DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 388 854 CE 070 269

AUTHOR	Bossort, Patty; And Others
TITLE	Learning To Learn: Impacts of the Adult Basic Education Experience on the Lives of Participants.
INSTITUTION	Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia, Vancouver.
SPONS AGENCY	British Columbia Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, Victoria.; National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa (Ontario).
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7719-0800-8
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	128p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Curriculum Publications, Marketing Dept., Open Learning Agency, 4355 Mathissi Place, Burnaby, British Columbia V5G 4S8, Canada (order no. VA0173).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; *Education Work Relationship; Foreign Countries; *Literacy Education; *Outcomes of Education; Records (Forms); *Role of Education; *School Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*British Columbia

ABSTRACT

A qualitative study examined the effects of participation in literacy or adult basic education (ABE) programs on the lives of former students. Intensive confidential interviews were conducted with 45 self-selected former ABE students in British Columbia, Canada. From the standpoints of age, ethnic origin, gender, ABE entry level, and type of program attended, the former students represented a very diverse group. Fifteen ABE instructors were also interviewed regarding the intended impacts of ABE programs. The most salient impacts of the ABE experience were psychological. Respondents credited ABE with increasing their self-esteem/self-confidence and thereby enabling them to make important changes in their lives. It was concluded that, by helping people learn to learn and learn that they have learned, ABE/literacy programs enhance individual, family, and community growth and potential. The study findings emphasized the following: rethinking the dropout label, systemic support for lifelong learning, the importance of connecting with others, the need to contribute to the world, and the role of ABE in the economy and society. (Appendixes contain the following: information about terms used, study methodology, and the interviewees; definitions of literacy; release form; one interviewee's story; and a 42-item bibliography.) (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 388 854

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

● Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN **OTHER THAN PAPER COPY** HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A Thomas

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LEARNING TO LEARN:

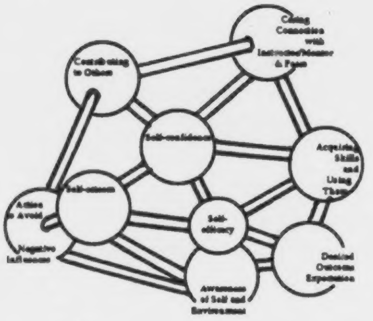
IMPACTS OF THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION EXPERIENCE ON THE LIVES OF PARTICIPANTS

by

Patty Bossort **Bruce Cottingham** **Leslie Gardner**

for

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA


Caring Connection with Instructor/Mentor & Peers
Contributing to Others
Self-confidence
Acquiring Skills and Using Them
Self-esteem
Action to Avoid Negative Influences
Self-efficacy
Desired Outcome Expectation
Awareness of Self and Environment

Project funding by:
The National Literacy Secretariat
Human Resources Development Canada
and
Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, British Columbia

Printed on recycled paper

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data
Bossort, Patty.
Learning to learn

1. Literacy programs--British Columbia--Evaluation. 2.
Elementary education of adults--British Columbia--Evaluation.
I. Cottingham, Bruce. II. Gardner, Leslie. III. Adult Basic
Education Association of B.C. IV. Title.
LC154.2.B7B68 1995 374'.012'09711 C95-910509-3

To order copies of this publication contact:

Curriculum Publications
Marketing Department
Open Learning Agency
4355 Mathissi Place
Burnaby, BC
Canada V5G 4S8
Telephone: 604-431-3210
Toll free telephone: 1-800-663-1653
Fax: 604-431-3381

Learning to Learn
Order number: VA0173
ISBN: 0-7719-0800-8

For further information on adult literacy programs contact:

Provincial Literacy Coordinator
Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia, V8V 1X4
Telephone: (604) 387-6174, Fax: (604) 356-8851

For further information regarding the Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia contact:

Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia
c/o South Hill Education Centre
Marilee Schelp, President
6010 Fraser Street
Vancouver, BC V5W 2Z7

Copyright 1994, Province of British Columbia,
Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour.

THIS PUBLICATION MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research could not have been accomplished without the generous contribution of time from the former students and instructors who agreed to be interviewed. We were impressed and moved by their willingness to share their life stories and philosophies.

We extend our gratitude to the members of the Adult Basic Education Association of B.C. Projects Committee: Paula Davies, Chair, Alan Creighton-Kelly, Jim Bray, Frank Costello and Pauli Doucette for their supervision, support and critical feedback.

Thanks also to the following individuals who so generously gave their time, shared their opinions and experience, and helped us to locate former students.

In Prince George:

Paula Davies, College of New Caledonia; Frank Costello, Prince George School District.

In Vancouver:

Sharon Babu, Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House; Rene Merkel, Betty Nobel, Vancouver Community College, King Edward Campus; Grace Mirehouse, Lorraine Fox, Liix Lopez, Bernice Heather, Native Education Centre. Debbie Bryant, Carnegie Centre; Linda Mitchell, Literacy B.C; Kelly Berry, Squamish Band Office; Sandy Middleton, Adult Literacy Contact Centre; Gary Pharness, Hastings Institute; Debra Portenga, Clearbrook Community Services; Juleen McElgren, Abbotsford Continuing Education; Judy Rose, Capilano College; Elizabeth Thompson, Skilplan; Mary Carlisle, Joyce Cameron, Douglas College; Wendy Watson, Dan Cram, Marg Penney, University College of the Fraser Valley; Willie Blonde, John Howard Society; CBC Radio; CFMI; CFOX; CKNW; COOP Radio; BCTV; CBCTV; KVU; UTV; RogersTV; Bob Watson, MSSH; Crabtree Corner; Powell Place.

In the West Kootenay Region:

Wendy Tagami, Richard Allin, Marvin Work, Deirdre Henry, Richard Cima, Selkirk College; Sue Port, West Kootenay Project Literacy; Gary Wright, West Kootenay Express; Betty Carlson, Nelson Daily News; Michael Philips, Trail School District; Elizabeth Nunn, Slocan Valley Swami.

We especially appreciated the donation of rooms to conduct interviews offered by literacy programs in all three areas: Native Education Centre, Vancouver; Vancouver Community College, King Edward Campus; Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, Vancouver; Project Refocus, Prince George; College of New Caledonia, Prince George; Selkirk College, Trail and Crescent Valley.

It was a pleasure to meet and discuss the conceptual framework with Dr. Beth Balshaw of Calgary, Alberta. Her warm and generous assistance improved the clarity and strength of the *Learning to Learn* model and the report itself.

Acknowledgements

We had the help of several people to type transcripts and format the final report. We appreciated their expertise, patience and generosity: Lesley Ward, James Meronyk, Wendy Harlock, Deborah Burgess, Nancy Guisse. Special thanks to our research assistant, Ganga JoliCoeur and to our production assistant, Brighid McGarry of The Office (Edmonton). We are also grateful to Pauline Peters and Margaret Sadler of Edmonton who provided their professional editing expertise.

Finally, wee wish to acknowledge our friends, spouses, families and pets who patiently supported us throughout the project.

Patty Bossort   Bruce Cottingham   Leslie Gardner

November 1994

The Adult Basic Education Association of B.C. (ABEABC) gratefully acknowledges the support of the National Literacy Secretariat and the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour in funding this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REPORT SUMMARY v
1. Major Impacts vi
2. Essence Of The Impacts vii
3. A Conceptual Model and Hypothesis vii
4. Implications For Planning and Delivering ABE/Literacy Resources ix

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER I — LIVES BEFORE AND DURING ABE 9
A. Past Experiences 9
B. Why Participants Started ABE 12
C. The Experience Of Participating In ABE 13

CHAPTER II — IMPACTS OF THE ABE EXPERIENCE 18
A. Those Who Were Well Served By The ABE Experience 18
1. Learning About The World (Educational Impacts) 18
2. Discovering Themselves (Psychological and Social Impacts) 22
3. Acting in the World (Community and Economic Impacts) 30
B. Those Who Were Not Well Served By The ABE Experience 35
C. The Impacts As Expected By ABE Instructors 40
1. Educational and Functional Gains 41
2. Psychological and Social Changes 42
3. Community and Economic Participation 44

CHAPTER III — DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS 45
A. Summary And Comparative Review Of The Impacts 45
1. Educational Impacts 45
2. Psychological and Social Impacts 46
3. Community and Economic Impacts 50
4. A Comparison With Instructors' Expected Impacts 54
B. The Essence Of The ABE Impacts Set In A Learning to Learn Model 54
1. Learning to Learn: The Essence Of The ABE Impacts 54
2. Developing the Learning to Learn Model 57
3. A Context for Learning to Learn 61
C. Implications for Planning and Delivering ABE/Literacy Resources 70
1. Rethinking The Drop-out Label 71
2. Systemic Support For Life-long Learning 72
3. Connecting With Others 74
4. Contributing To The World 76
5. The Role Of Adult Basic Education In The Economy and Society 77

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Terms Of Reference ... 81

APPENDIX B
Research Methodology ... 83

APPENDIX C
Introduction of Interviewees ... 99

APPENDIX D
Definitions of Literacy ... 103

APPENDIX E
Release Form ... 107

APPENDIX F
Phyllis's Story ... 109

BIBLIOGRAPHY ... 117

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA / ABOUT THE AUTHORS ... 121

TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE A
Process Themes
Core Variable: Living Intentionally ... 64

TABLE B
ABE Experiences in Relation to the Living Intentionally Process ... 65

FIGURE 1
The Interactive Nature of the Elements in the
Learning to Learn Model of ABE Impacts ... 59

REPORT SUMMARY

The aims of this exploratory, qualitative research project were

1. to determine the nature of the effects that participation in a Literacy or Adult Basic Education (ABE) program has had on the lives of former students from their perspective;
2. to describe the intended effects on the lives of students from instructors' perspectives; and
3. to discover what observations and conclusions may be drawn from such research.

This study was not meant to be an evaluation of the effectiveness of ABE programs. It merely sought to describe impacts as experienced by former participants. Intensive confidential interviews were conducted with 45 self-selected former ABE students, and 15 ABE instructors. The former student interviews took place in three varied locations in British Columbia (Vancouver, Prince George and the West Kootenay region). The criteria for the selection of the former ABE students were

1. that they had been enrolled in an ABE/Literacy program for at least three months;
2. that they had been away from their last ABE course for at least one year at the time of being interviewed; and
3. that they were willing to participate voluntarily in the study.

The participants in this study were diverse in age, ethnic origin, gender, ABE entry level (Fundamental, Intermediate and Advanced), and type of program background (college, school district, and community agency based or other ABE program sponsor). The research strategy was to discover common patterns within a broadly diverse group. From this process the essence that characterizes the impacts of ABE on the lives of former students could emerge.

Our approach to examining the nature of ABE impacts was designed to ensure researcher contact with a wide variety of ABE outcome experiences, good and bad. However, the vast majority (over 90 percent) of the former students who participated in our study reported positive impacts. Our data analysis became an analysis of the experience primarily of people who felt they had been well served. Similarly, these results required a conceptual framework that explained why students experienced positive impacts. We developed a sense of what helped successful students to be successful and we have offered a hypothesis that may be empirically tested.

The results of implementing this research strategy are summarized as major impacts, essence of the impacts, a conceptual model and hypothesis, and implications for planning and delivering ABE Literacy Resources.

1. Major Impacts

The instructors' expected impacts and the impacts reported by former ABE/Literacy students were consistent and fell into three categories:

a. Educational Impacts
b. Psychological and Social Impacts
c. Community and Economic Impacts

In this study the most salient and impressive impacts of the ABE experience have been psychological. People spoke of increased self-esteem and self-confidence which led them to reach out and make important changes in themselves and their lives. The positive impact of ABE is radical in the best sense. **It is like turning on a light: things are never the same.** The nature of a positive impact from the ABE experience is that it is a long-term powerful influence.

2. Essence Of The Impacts

Through all the educational, psychological, social, community and economic impacts, the primary essence of the ABE experience that has emerged is that **people are learning to learn**.

Participants reported many instances of having learned concrete skills that they could apply and find helpful and practical. Even more importantly, however, is that **people have learned that they have learned**. They now have the confidence that they can keep on learning on all kinds of levels throughout their lives.

This increased confidence has led many individuals to risk trying new things and participate in new ways in their families and their communities.

Literacy is a developmental concept where individual, family and community growth and potential are enhanced. The positive process of learning to learn is also a classic definition of empowerment and a condition for optimum well-being.

3. A Conceptual Model and Hypothesis

A model of *learning to learn* was developed using the idea of a molecule to illustrate that the elements affect and are affected by each other. For most people in our study, the model of *learning to learn* ran as follows: the impact of acquiring reading, writing and numeracy skills enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, which influenced the ability to separate from past negative influences, to greater reaching out, and to independence and participation in the world. Self-confidence was also very much nurtured and affected by a caring connection with an instructor and peers who believed in the students and helped them to acquire and use the skills that they were seeking. This in turn facilitated greater awareness of self and others, and offered choices which led to greater self-confidence. This enabled risk-taking and activities that made a contribution to others. All of this was involved in the process of successful life-style changes as people began to see and believe that they were capable of the behaviours that would lead them to the outcomes they wanted.

The *learning to learn* model helps to explain how the ABE experience contributes positively to the evolution of responsible adults getting on with their lives. The model is also useful in explaining what had happened for those former students who were not well served by their ABE experience.

There is a great deal of congruence between many of the processes described in the present study and the process outlined in Balshaw's (1993) conceptual framework. Balshaw's model of *living intentionally* was developed in the area of family violence, with adult men who witnessed spousal abuse in their childhood but who have remained nonviolent. Balshaw (1993) suggested an ever-opening spiral in which the process of *living intentionally* loops from becoming aware, resolving to be different, and acting on their decisions, back to an increasing and deeper level of awareness. The major themes in the *living intentionally* process were strikingly similar to those observed in the stories of students who had experienced positive ABE impacts. As applied to the ABE experience, the themes include students:

a. becoming aware of the environment and themselves;
b. resolving to live more positive lives;
c. connecting with others; and
d. contributing to the world.

In the present study, it was generally the case that the more radical the changes the ABE students had made in their lives, the more these themes had been part of the process. From a comparison of the elements of the stories behind most ABE experiences and the elements of Balshaw's model, it seems that the process of *living intentionally* may have formed the context within which *learning to learn* could take place.

4. Implications For Planning and Delivering ABE/Literacy Resources

Several implications for ABE practice can be drawn from the researchers' conclusion and hypothesis:

> **To the degree that any ABE program nurtures and enables the *learning to learn* model and the *living intentionally* process, enduring positive impacts as described in this study will result.**

This means that the system of planning and delivering ABE should facilitate students' becoming aware of their environment, themselves, and their real learning needs. The ABE system should support students' taking responsibility for living more fulfilling lives while making a commitment to the learning process that is relevant to them. The researchers believe there are five major implications to be drawn from viewing the results through a model that promotes intentional living in the context of ABE. They are:

a. rethinking the drop-out label;
b. systemic support for life-long learning;
c. the importance of connecting with others;
d. the need to contribute to the world; and
e. the role of adult basic education in the economy and society.

The report concludes with a discussion of these implications.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

In 1990 at the Literacy 2000 conference held at Douglas College, New Westminster, John Ryan of UNESCO, gave the keynote speech. As part of his discussion on the value and meaning of literacy, he posed the question:

> Your clients, I am certain, appreciate a well-conducted program, but what counts most is not what happens in the classroom or tutoring centre, but what comes after and as a result of it in their lives. Does literacy make their lives fuller and more meaningful?

Instructors and tutors often wonder about this question, wishing they would hear from students they taught a year ago or more. They wonder what their past students are doing now and in what way they benefited from their time in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) or Literacy program. Program planners, instructors, and tutors have lots of ideas about the impact increasing literacy skills will or should have on the student and on our society. However, little research has been done in Canada or the United States to confirm these assumptions.

The Adult Basic Education Association of B.C. decided it was a question worth investigating and so applied for funds from the Adult Literacy Cost Shared Fund, Grants for Literacy, to explore the matter. They contracted with this research team to discover answers to the question:

> What have been the impacts of literacy education on the lives of former Literacy and/or Adult Basic Education students?

The full Terms of Reference for the study may be found in Appendix A.

Methodology

This study is an initial exploration into the question using qualitative research methods. Because what each person defines as meaningful is so personal, our study involved extensive interviews with former students. Our goal was to provide an opportunity for them to express their own thoughts and opinions informally.

Because this study focused on what former ABE/Literacy students had experienced in the past, what they were experiencing in the present, and how they interpreted lasting impacts on their lives, it reflected a traditional phenomenological perspective. We searched for the *essences* of the impact of having participated in an ABE/Literacy program. The reseachers took an active, interpretative role by interacting individually with those people who were willing to tell their stories. We combined this with methods for ensuring the quality and credibility of our qualitative research as described in Appendix B.

Definitions of literacy abound and many related studies begin with such a discussion. We decided not to repeat that exercise. We were interested in the impacts of participating in a literacy program, in any of its many variations found in British Columbia over the years. Quite simply, for the purposes of this study we defined literacy instruction and adult basic education as the same. For this reason we have used the form ABE/Literacy or the terms ABE and literacy interchangeably.

We did not try to correlate the degree or kind of impact experienced to the literacy level or the type of program attended. We did not try to anticipate impacts based on the stated purposes or goals of the programs. Nor did we try to compare the impacts described by each former student with their motivations for attending programs. We were simply looking for any impacts, expected or unexpected, positive or negative, explicit or implicit, as former ABE students reflected upon and described their experiences.

Those Who Were Interviewed

Forty-five former students were individually interviewed for up to three hours each. The number was limited to 3 areas of the Province (Vancouver, Prince George and the West Kootenays) in order to make the study manageable given the time and budget available. A former student was defined as a person who had attended an ABE/Literacy program within the last 10 years for a minimum of three consecutive months and who had been away from that program for at least a year.

We interviewed people who attended Fundamental, Intermediate or Advanced level programs (see Appendix B for definitions of these levels). They participated in college, school district and community sponsored programs. Some people were so determined to continue their education despite setbacks, that they had attended two or three different programs over the course of many years. The means of instruction experienced also varied with each individual: volunteer tutors, paid instructors, one-to-one tutoring, self-paced individualized learning packages and group instruction.

The people who volunteered to be interviewed represented many different economic backgrounds and family situations. In this sense there did not appear to be a typical ABE/Literacy student. Our interviewees were men and women, parents and non-parents, single or coupled, employed and unemployed, assertive and lacking in self confidence, living on welfare or unemployment insurance and others earning well above the national average. There were non-readers as well as those able to read and do math at various levels. Appendix C provides a short description of each person interviewed.

We found students to interview through posters, public service announcements on radio and TV, newspaper articles, and agency contacts. However, the most efficient way of finding former students was through contacts made by instructors and tutors. Since the largest number of former students were contacted this way, our sample may represent a group that is less transient than other students. Some students may also have been selected by their former instructors because they have continued in the educational system and were therefore easier to find.

The Interview Process

The former student interviews ranged from half an hour to three hours long. Most were about two hours. The length depended on how comfortable the student felt and the amount he or she was interested in sharing. The interviews were informally structured. Although we knew many of the topics we wanted to discuss, it was also important to provide opportunities for the students to direct the conversation. We did not want to miss any topics that were important to them. In all instances participants shared intimate details of their lives and past educational experiences.

In a typical interview we started by finding out something about their educational background when they were children. We asked about what education their parents had and how much their family and childhood community valued education. We were interested in when and how they decided to start upgrading their education as adults and what results they had expected from participating in an ABE/Literacy program.

We asked participants about the experience of participating in a program. What did they study? How was the program organized? What happened on a typical day? We encouraged them to talk about their memories and feelings about their instructor or tutor, the other students, the materials, and program activities. What effect did going back to school have on their families?

Finally we wanted to hear about the long term impacts of having participated in an upgrading program. In what ways are their lives continuing to be affected?

Why Former Students Were Willing To Tell Their Stories

Most people volunteered to be interviewed because they felt positively about the impact of participating in an ABE/Literacy program and wanted to share their experiences as a way of encouraging others. We did, however, meet a couple of people who volunteered because they wished to share their frustrations about what they had experienced. More importantly, however, they wished to find out where they could go to truly satisfy their needs and further their education.

Like others, Cynthia was very forthright in her reason for being interviewed.

> People have to know about these things. People have to start understanding that there are a lot of people out there who are scared of saying they're this or they're that, and that they can't do this or that. We have to start realizing these things. And they are mainly adults.
>
> I know how hard it is and what kinds of feelings they have about it. And it's not an easy thing. I know people take reading everyday for granted. It's a privilege to read. There are a lot of people out there who can't read and I know how they feel because I was like that too.

Tom wanted to make sure everyone was aware of the opportunities and the benefits.

> Because I think more and more people should be aware of the opportunity and may want to go back but don't know how, where to go. Government should be aware of how much of an asset it is to many people who want to go back but don't know how or where to go or don't have the financial ability or the mobility to get to school. People should know how to do all of this. Adult Basic Education is an opportunity for you to go back, pick up the things you missed in high school and apply them in everyday life. Once we get past the age of 23 or 24 our learning changes and we become far more intrigued with things at a different level and everyone should have the opportunity. So my doing this may help somebody with that.

We Also Interviewed Instructors and Tutors

Participation in an ABE/Literacy program usually involves a relationship between an instructor or tutor and the student. To enrich our understanding we also interviewed 15 instructors and tutors to get their point of view. We wanted to find out what instructors or tutors expected the impacts of participation to be on their students.

Many of the instructors we interviewed had been in the field for 10 years or more. They have been part of rapidly changing philosophies about methodology and curriculum. Regardless of method or material, all the instructors continue to strive towards providing their students with successful learning experiences. One instructor described her evolving ideas about teaching as follows:

> I really felt that my responsibility in the beginning was just to create a successful learning atmosphere. It was my first encounter with people who had very disturbing family backgrounds. It hit me really strongly. When I began to hear the stories that came out of my students I was horrified. I just wanted to do anything to make them feel better about themselves and about school. I don't want to ever lose that but now I really feel a strong responsibility to help these students achieve their educational goals too. I believe that while being nurturing and warm I really need to push a little bit.

We also asked several instructors to tell us their definitions of literacy. Their responses are quoted in Appendix D.

The Report Format

In reporting the findings, our desire has been to present students' thoughts and opinions in their own voices as much as possible. To protect the privacy of the students interviewed, we have given them all fictitious names throughout the report. Permission was obtained from each person to use material from the interview in our report (Appendix E).

Chapters I and II of the report summarize information from former students describing their lives before participating in an ABE/Literacy program, their experiences while in those programs and their thoughts about the impacts that participation has had on their lives. We have categorized their thoughts and woven a story, largely in their own words, from the histories of many individuals. One person's complete story is included as Appendix F. Excerpts from this interview were included so that the reader can get a thorough understanding of the scope and depth of experience typically expressed to the researchers by former ABE students.

Chapter III contains our interpretation of the findings and the implications for practice. It is divided into three parts. Section A provides a summary of the impacts of the ABE experience on the lives of participants as they have described them. Comments on how those results compare to other outcome and follow-up studies, as well as instructor expectations, have been included. Section B contains the researchers' distillation of the impacts into the *essence* of the ABE experience. This essence is explored in a conceptual framework. Section C proposes an hypothesis based upon our results and the conceptual framework outlined. Finally, the hypothesis and the implications of what we have learned are discussed in relation to the practical aspects of organizing and delivering ABE/Literacy resources.

CHAPTER I — LIVES BEFORE AND DURING ABE

The effects of the ABE experience on the lives of learners are both varied and profound. They are most impressive when placed in the context of whole lives changing over time. In this chapter we will describe the personal and educational backgrounds of the former ABE participants interviewed. They will tell of the many reasons they got involved in ABE and of their experiences while attending programs. In this way a canvas will be created upon which the effects can viewed.

A. Past Experiences

A few of the former ABE participants interviewed had relatively healthy and happy childhoods. Their school experiences were basically positive. They simply quit school out of boredom or a desire to do something else. They returned to school later to complete a few courses "to get grade 12." They were blessed in their health, their home life and their past school experience.

However, the more common stories included descriptions of neglect, low income, lack of self-esteem, abuse, and learning disabilities. Most of those interviewed had faced major difficulties in their lives as children and adults.

In all but two cases the ABE participants had attended a school as children. Two people had been raised in a Doukhobor community which did not send its children to school at that time. Interestingly, these people talked of how, as children, they had longed to go to school and get an education. Later the possibility of schooling through adult education was a scary, but positive, opportunity.

Aboriginal learners talked about their experiences in residential schools where they were treated poorly, removed from their families and forced to forget their language and culture. Getting an education as an adult was often discussed as a way to help their people as well as to pursue their own personal goals.

> For ten months a year I was away from my family. It was a very distressful experience. I went to that infamous mission school, you probably read about it in the newspapers. That was the residential school I attended for grade 1 to grade 9. Then I went to [another residential school] for grades 10 and 11. It never was a happy time for anybody. It was sort of like a hospital prison. It had what you'd call the hallmarks of internment. That is, what I remember about it is sort of the aspects of internment. I was hungry quite a lot, stressed out quite a lot. Earlier on we were called by numbers, stuff like that. The things that you read about cultural genocide, it is certainly very true. The effects of course you can see today, but those stories, they are so horrifying, and you think that they have got to be making those things up. Well they're not made up. They're absolutely true. The beatings, those types of things, I saw those things, I know they're true. Being an adaptable independent person, I never put myself in the situation of being beaten, or sexually abused, or hurt. But I would say that I suffered as much as my relatives that did because in our society, you don't have an individual identity, you have a collective identity. And I can recall my sister's number was 89, how upsetting that was to hear that number called. What was going to happen to her? I knew all my relatives' numbers...If I hadn't had such a tremendously, sort of idyllic Aboriginal lifestyle in the summer, I probably would have a lot of trouble coming to terms with the residential school experience. The after effects of it, they never go away, you always remember those things. Sita

The following quotes illustrate the earlier lives of the ABE participants.

Some had physical problems:

> I went to grade 9 and about that time I was diagnosed with epilepsy. I was in and out of hospital constantly and was therefore missing a lot of school. And when I was back the teachers didn't give two hoots. They wouldn't help me catch up on what I had missed. It was my problem. Winston

> I failed grades 2 and 4. I had a hearing problem. I usually sat at the back when I should have been sitting at the front. The problem has gone away. It was a middle ear infection. Madeira

Others didn't have much support for schooling:

> My mother went to work when I was 5. But there was no babysitting for me since I was 5 years old. I was always with older children. My mother put me in Grade 1 when I was 5. And we moved every year, so every year it was a new school. So that's an awful learning situation for a child to be in. To come from a dirt poor family, shabby, really poorly dressed, and to be ashamed of that all the time, and you are always the new kid in school. Not a positive experience. Peter

> My parents were drinking quite heavily. I couldn't feel normal, couldn't concentrate, all I wanted to do was to get out and get a job. I couldn't keep up anymore. Couldn't seem to do it. I just gave up. Manon

Some didn't think they needed an education:

> I got up to Grade 11, then dropped out two months before completing. My English was probably a grade 9. I got married at 18 and had a child. It was the late 70's. The local norm seemed to be attending school but not graduating. You could get jobs without finishing school. Becky

Often it seemed that the school didn't seem to care if they learned or not:

> Lot of kids dropped out. I think there was only one in my family who graduated and I come from a family of six. Now there are more graduating but end up having to take more courses to get into college and university because they are pushing them through to say "We have this many native graduates and aren't we great and aren't we wonderful". But a lot of native kids I know today don't know grade 12 math or English. Manon

> I was a little nervous [signing up for ABE] 'cause I wasn't quite sure how they go about doing it. I think my fear was of wondering if they would do the same thing they did in school. They just moved me along in school. The teachers were not teaching me. Somehow I graduated but really I didn't know how to write or do math. Anders

Many had lived with negative pictures of themselves since childhood:

> I always thought of myself as dumb. I thought if I could get my grade 12, I could prove to myself that I could do it and prove to my kids that they aren't too old if I could do it. I wasn't secure. I always felt that I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that. That I wasn't as good as anybody else. That they were way better than I was. Shilona

> It is hard to live with kids that are ashamed of who you are and who they are, and you cannot help them. You can see why they're ashamed, but to help them out of it is difficult, especially if you can't get out of it yourself. In reality I was ashamed of who I was. Colleen

> I grew up in an abusive home, dysfunctional family and stuff...I dropped out of school at an early age, about eleven years old I just lost interest in school. Plus stuff was happening in my home life. I just started rebelling I guess. I found myself in group homes, and eventually into a youth containment centre, with lock-ups and stuff... Later I tried getting back into school in jail, I'd just been out for so much time. Being in jail is such a different lifestyle. You got to adapt. You got to play this different role and be a tough guy or something, just because you won't make it if you don't. So you have to adapt to this lifestyle and being in school wasn't part of that lifestyle. Sam

> I had no skills...I was basically a criminal... I'd spent a lot of time at the bar at this time and got heavily into everything. So I thought that I'm not going to those crappy jobs. There was more money to be made out on the streets than

> on those jobs...I got out of that lifestyle and just went into being a mother on welfare...At one point it got to the point where I didn't leave my house for a couple of years.
>
> Colleen

B. Why Participants Started ABE

Participants described many different reasons for enrolling in an ABE/Literacy program:

They wanted to help their children:

> I guess the strongest motivation was my daughter. Because if she needs help, I won't be able to help her. I'm going to have to know what the heck I'm doing... Like I said, I wanted to do it for a long time, but I wasn't in the right place at the right time. I guess for myself, my self esteem. I could be able to say that I took it, I completed it, just to feel better about myself. Betty

People wanted better jobs:

> I feel in this day and age you've gotta have that education if you wanna good job. You can't even wash dishes now without it. I worked for a janitorial service but I wanted to accomplish more in life. I wanted to go back to school so I made up my mind that I could do it, and show my kids that I could do it. I was a coward until I got sponsorship from welfare. My social worker encouraged me to go. Shilona

> I just can't work at a job where I'm never going to achieve anything my whole life and just barely survive...I like spending time with my daughter. My daughter is very important to me. And if I have to work, I want to work in something I want to do. I don't want to spend that much time away from her to work at a menial job like I always have. It's really bothered me. If I'm spending time away from her I should be doing something more. Ruth

They wanted to change their lifestyles:

> One day I just said, "That's it. I want to do something with my life. And lately I discovered there are a lot of people out there who don't know how to read...I picked up a book one day and couldn't read it. And I said "I've got to learn how to do this."
>
> Heather

> Because of no schooling there were no jobs. It carried on for about fifteen, sixteen years: dealing drugs, in and out of jail, stuff like that. Last year I was up on a very serious charge and I got very lucky and beat it. It made me take a look at my life because they were looking at putting me away for about ten to twenty years. I sat in lock-up for about four months. It was scary. So I started turning my life around. I went to a treatment centre and dealt with a lot of childhood issues...Now my long-term goal is to get my BSW, which will be four years, which will be hard, but all the steps I'm taking now are sort of stepping stones towards my bigger goal. Sam

> I had been a single parent for about thirteen years on welfare and I was really tired of standing in the Food Bank line. I was really tired of being poor. I grew up with the idea that you get married and someone looks after you, but that had kind of gone by the wayside, so I finally realized that wasn't going to happen, and nothing was going to happen other than what was already happening unless I did it... After fifteen years of being a single parent and nothing was changing, so I had to come to that conclusion that either you are going to do it yourself, or its not going to be done. Colleen

They wanted to learn:

> There were a lot of jobs that I wanted. I knew I could do except for that paper that said I had grade 12. That always bothered me. I could never accept GED. I don't know why. I just thought it was...I said I could sit down here. You can give me a test tomorrow. I can memorize what I have to know and tomorrow I can pass it but I still haven't learned how to do all these things. I always did not like to memorize. I wanted to learn. Jarrett

They wanted to be respected:

> It bothered me, being a mom, I have a daughter, and not having a grade 12, that really bothered me. I think that is what basically made me get it. It really bothered me. Debbie

They had to overcome new circumstances:

> The main reason for my going back was because of my disability...starting all over in a new career. Sarah

> I have no source of income right now, no unemployment insurance. I have nothing. WCB had decided to retrain me at the same time that my UIC ran out. My hands are finished from 18 years as a miner working underground. The rest of my body can take the cold, but my hands can't. Right now they've said don't go back to work. Peter

They wanted to leave abusive situations:

> I was married to this man and let's say he wasn't very nice. We split up and I moved, and I just thought well...I was abused physically and mentally, so I decided to go back to school and get a better education. Because I met him when I was 16, and I was married for 18 years. I was unemployed and thought well, if I get a better education I could get a better job. Madeira

C. The Experience Of Participating In ABE

Many people felt afraid in the beginning. Learning was a new experience for some. Each person approached the ABE experience differently. Some people treated it like a full-time job. Almost all of those interviewed appreciated patient, responsive and respectful instructors.

Most participants felt a variety of emotions very deeply:

> It was quite a struggle to go to school, because I was not the same person that I am now...Participating in upgrading brings back a lot of old ghosts. If you had a lot of difficulty in school, those things are going to come back during up-grading. Agatha
>
> New things are scary to me. Being around people I don't know is scary to me...doing something you've never done before... the thought of failure. Thinking I'm going to be the stupidest one there. I'm going to fail. That was really scary. What if I go in and I can't do the stuff and I look really stupid? I didn't have much confidence in myself. Some days I would come home from school and be emotionally drained and go to bed and cry and cry and I hated it and I was never going back and I would get up and go back the next day and do it all over again. And it just became easier and easier. Ruth

Having patient and sympathetic instructors was very important:

> I thought, "I can't take another rejection." But when I went in for the assessment it was fine. She made you feel really comfortable. Becky
>
> I will say all the instructors must have a degree in psychology to do what they did. I was so proud of myself and so happy with the instructor. I said nobody else would have taken the time to approach it the way he did... Tom
>
> There was one instructor, she would come to your desk and talk to you like you were her friend or something. She would just help you a lot. She would sit down and explain word for word what it meant and why. I thought that was good. Madeira

They learned many different things and generally liked how the instructors taught them:

> I enjoyed meeting new people and getting to talk with them and not to myself. The other thing would be learning what the teachers were saying and knowing more about how to write and do stuff. How to write a summary and do paragraphs. I took typing and learning how to write. Anders
>
> Mine was all on my own. It was sort of like you set your own pace, and I can recall racing through whole exercises, and then I would get stuck on one for three days, and I would have to practice it over and over. And then I'd get that, and then I'd maybe struggle on the next one a little bit, and then the penny would drop, and I'd go racing along again. It was all like that. And I thought one of the really nice things about the ABE program was that it allowed you to do that. And I could certainly see the frustration for children in the regular school system. I really felt that I had one son that would benefit very much from the ABE program rather than high school. Sita
>
> There were some things I especially liked about the aboriginal programs. The part that was really beneficial to me was the cultural classes. Colleen

> Every Wednesday morning we would sit in a circle and all talk about what we had learned and what we had accomplished during the last week. We spoke openly and if we had family problems, or if we did great, we talked about it. It really helps. It is like we are in a family group. If someone is having problems in math, and you get a high mark, you go to that person who will help you. That's the way it works and it kind of makes it like it is personalized. Shilona

Looking back, some people realize how important personalized attention and testing for learning disabilities is:

> There is no testing for learning disabilities at the college. They need testing. They may be brilliant and they are just wasting and it is not very good for the economy. Because these people may be on social assistance or they may be working at jobs where they are feeling very frustrated with themselves and the system. It is too institutionalized and I think it needs to take a more personalized look at people instead of a program that just lets a certain amount through and lets the rest fall behind. Like the elementary and high school system, they are not structured for people who may not come from the best backgrounds or from the best environment. The schooling system needs to take away the institutionalized form because society is changing. Agatha

It was sometimes hard to keep going for a variety of reasons:

> With my knee and my back I have to take pills, pain killers every day. Sarah

> It went up to grade 12, but that was when I was going through a divorce and I had two young kids. It was really difficult. I need to really concentrate when I study. I have tunnel vision, or I can't retain anything. And it was hard. [We asked Manon which came first, the upset in her marriage or the course]It was during the course, maybe two or three weeks after I started, that we started having real problems. I sort of put it on the back burner and said "I can't deal with this now"...I left the course about six years ago because of marital problems. Manon

Many who succeeded were very determined from the beginning:

> I think you really have to work at what you want to do. These people that go into it have to really want to better themselves. Because if you don't, there is no point in taking it. You're not going to let it help you then. Becky

Still, some had to leave because they did not have enough money:

> I think that is really important for people to have this while going to programs. You need money. You have to have money. You have to have something to live off. The three men in the class quit because they weren't receiving enough money to support their families. They really needed it. They just needed to go out and find a job to support their families. Ruth

> Then I thought I can't live like that. I have to go and work. I was in this school for three seasons and a half and then I have to quit because of my money situation. I found a job as a homemaker [and am still doing it]. Corrine

Lack of child care was also a reason why a number left :

> I'd have to say that I did start out when my baby was about a year old, that's my youngest one. I started out with Open Learning, and signed up for two or three courses. I was a total novice at correspondence. I didn't realize that going through Open Learning, it's like doing six times the amount of work. It was so overwhelming, and I had a newborn baby, so I simply withdrew from all the courses. Sita

Some were supported by their families:

> My father always wanted to go to university and be an architect. He's really supportive and really tries to get us all to continue our education. Ruth

Some were not:

> George, I was pushing him away. Because he didn't want to be part of it. I was making new friends, I was talking about new things. I was more alive on what was going on everyday. I was getting very little from him. In fact I was getting more of, "This isn't done and that isn't done." So I would do it. I was up to midnight every night getting things done.
>
> George starting to feel more threatened, getting quieter and quieter. George was slowly losing control of me. I never knew how much control he had. Because I can be controlled. I can still be controlled but now I've learned to question. So what he did indirectly was make things around the house tougher and tougher. But I just began to ignore him. If the vacuuming didn't get done, I didn't care anymore. If the walls needed washing I didn't care. If the meals weren't ready, I didn't care. They were ready when I finally got them done.
>
> I started to look at him and go, "You have two hands. The TV is always there. If you choose to not help me that's your choice." I never came out and said it, but indirectly that was the message. Barb

Many of the former students we interviewed told us they tried to sign up for programs several times before doing it or finding one that fit their personal style. Once registered many had to leave to attend to other responsibilities. They described returning for several months or a year, rotating in and out of programs as suited their situations. These learners were truly lifelong learners determined to continue learning and upgrading their education gradually -- confronting and overcoming many obstacles on the way.

So far we have described the varied backgrounds of ABE participants, the reasons they chose to particpate in ABE programs, and some of their experiences while participating in programs. We turn now to a picture of the impacts of the ABE experience from the point of view of former students at least a year after participation.

CHAPTER II — IMPACTS OF THE ABE EXPERIENCE

In this chapter former students tell about the impacts they still feel in their lives as a result of participating in an ABE/Literacy program. It is important to remember that each quotation is only an aspect of an individual life. Each illustration should be viewed as a leaf on a unique tree with its own complete story of how it has reached for the sun. (For one former student's whole story the reader can refer to Appendix F)

When the former students' stories are taken together, patterns emerge that create three branches. The lasting effects described by former learners fall into the following three categories:

1. Learning about the world (educational impacts)
2. Discovering themselves (psychological and social impacts)
3. Acting in the world (community and economic impacts)

While it cannot be said that all the impacts happened in any one person's life, each happened in the life of some participant in combination with other impacts.

Most of the former participants interviewed believe they were well served by the ABE experience. However there were also a couple of people interviewed who felt not so well served. Their experiences are described separately in Part B of this chapter.

A. Those Who Were Well Served By The ABE Experience

1. Learning About The World (Educational Impacts)

In the category of learning about the world or the educational impacts, people talked about gaining academic skills (reading, writing and math), finding new ways to do things, learning new ways to look at the world, discovering learning and achievement, finishing courses, attaining certificates and continuing on to further education and training.

Learning to read was very important:

> Your whole life changes. Say for example you go into a grocery store for crackers, or Nabob coffee. You can actually read what the box or the jar says. Before, forget it. I'd get the first letter. I'd know the letters of the alphabet. I couldn't read. Sometimes, I'd ask the salesperson where is the ketchup. I'd use that famous excuse about forgetting my glasses. He would show me where it was. I'd go pick it up. I knew by the shape. Now I can go anywhere in the store, pick up what I want. With banking I'd always let the cashier do it and I'd sign it. Now I take my cheque book out, I fill out the forms if I want to deposit money in the bank. I can do it. Heather
>
> I learned how to read. That was the most important thing in my life. I can read. Read a book and not a picture book neither. I feel good when I can read. I don't know why but I just didn't feel that good about myself. But now I feel fantastic. And now that I know how to read, I'm reading all the time. I still have trouble, but I'm learning. I break the words up and run them all together. And it's fun. I bought a book. It's a novel and a mystery. Before I couldn't pick up a book. Now I have a book with me wherever I go. Before I used to read for simple pleasure, now I find that I read books about stuff that I want to learn about, so it made quite a difference there, because I do read a lot of books. Betty
>
> I can pick up a newspaper now and read what it has to say. It makes me feel good. Instead of just looking up the pictures I can read what it says. Anders

Many improved their writing:

> I learned a lot, though. How to do writing for work, report writing...I went to the Convention and I applied the principles that I learned from the report writing seminar and I wrote my report and I gave my report verbally at the Union meeting and I got a standing ovation at the Union meeting because of the clarity and accuracy of my report and the manner I gave it in...The report was so organized and so clear and everything...was a direct result of the course, no doubt about it. Peter
>
> I still write a little bit. Eventually I want to write a book. I would have liked to continue doing another English course, but my husband keeps telling me that I'll be okay, and that maybe I could do that through correspondence. I wrote an essay for my English 51 which is going to be part of my book, and that is sort of a dream of mine that I wanted to do, so eventually I would just want to continue and keep fixing it up and keep going. Donna

They learned numeracy skills:

> I now know how to count. Corrine
>
> I wanted so bad to learn the metric because that's what we're into now, and I just didn't know anything about it. I hate it, but I didn't know. Now I can go into a store and I know that 2.2 pounds is a kilogram.
> Shilona
>
> Well, my math improved a bit. I could do a little more work on my English yet. I saw myself gaining some. Not as much as I would have liked. I might go back, whet my appetite. Jason

Many had never known how to study before:

> This is something I have learned, how to note and write things down.
> Heather
>
> Given all those advantages and abilities and given that background already, it was entirely necessary for me at that point in my life to go to ABE if I were to be successful at college. I say that in hindsight now because I was quite confident in my ability to study and learn, to achieve in that arena when I went to ABE. But I didn't realize until I was in the college technical program how important ABE was. I didn't realize how little I knew and particularly not just the contents of the textbooks. Study techniques kept me organized, so that I was not able only to get through but to excel. And wound up having the good fortune of winning a scholarship every semester and of being invited to participate in certain college functions, activities which left me very well connected, basically. Cameron

Many are now able to communicate more effectively with other people:

> To sit down in a room and look somebody in the eye and to make a point, to make them hear your point, to make them understand your point, that is an accomplishment that more and more people should experience. It's a good feeling going from nothing to that. Tom
>
> I think I can see things a lot clearer. Looking back I think I was very scattered in thought, and I couldn't communicate properly. With my family I could because I feel at ease, it's fine. But as soon as we go out to a function, my husband works for the school board now, I found that particularly hard. Had I not gone to school, I would have been freaked right out. You go to functions, and you can't just listen. Donna

They became aware of broader issues and other points of view:

> I remember one story I was writing, and I was just ticked off with him. "Nothing is ever right, you're always picking at my story!" After I had finished it and read it, the final version, the final draft, I realized that it was great that he did that. There were things that I changed in there. He

> sort of made me see things from a different point of view, and those things are priceless. The more of us, if we can put a different hat on, see things from a different point of view, as many point of views as we can, I think we're a better person for it. I think ABE has done that, and the instructors have done that. It's not the ABE program, it's the instructors that teach you, either make it or not make it. Donna

Some were shocked to learn about how other people live:

> I was personally shocked by this because of my upbringing. How many women don't realize that they are, to a certain point, being controlled by men? There was a couple of women in our class who had very abusive husbands. And there was a few married women in the class who I thought their lives were being run by these men. Since I've been on my own since I was 18, I've made all the decisions for myself and my child... I think why is this happening? Is this really a serious problem? And I find out it is. This is acceptable. This is normal. It's normal for these men to be verbally abusive. It's normal for women to do all the housework, all the cleaning, all the cooking. I was in a barn half my life. It's not normal for me. So it really has made me aware of women's issues because they were just not there for me before. Ruth

Many found out it's all right to have an opinion and express it:

> At the end of the Socials course, by about three or four sessions we were already hollering at each other. It was good. So that brought out the whole, it is okay to talk, it is okay to say because you have an opinion, and it is alright to have an opinion. It taught us that not everybody is going to agree. It's fine, everybody is different, that is what it taught us. Everybody has a point of view, and we should respect to listen to it. Donna

People discovered they loved to learn:

> I really liked learning. Made me get up in the mornings and have some place to go, felt good about learning something. Jane

> Now every day I think I learn something or I try and learn something every day because I've learned the value of learning. I love education. I love education. Just learning. And that all came about as a result of my Project Based Training course that I took. Before I took that I hadn't been to school. I hadn't. I had worked but never worked in challenging jobs. I never worked at learning anything new. They were all repetitive. Just getting into that course and starting to learn and challenging myself really opened up a whole new world for me. I started learning. I'm continually learning. I love learning. Ruth

Many accomplished their educational goals:

> Before I was just someone to bug, someone to get a laugh from. Now that I have achieved my GED and a few other courses too, I am able to apply for and receive respectable work and do it well. And that's a plus.

> And I have received comments from people saying I am doing a good job. Now that I like, that I am not just taking up space and filling in time. Winston

> It's like I'm on a roll now, and getting that diploma was a good thing. I said to myself many, many, many times over the years, I should go back to school, I should go back to school, but then year after year goes by and you don't do it. Now I have something to show for it, and that makes me feel better. Pierre

> I just had so much fun doing that, and before you knew it, I finished it! My provincial! I got this certificate in the mail that says, "Congratulations! Here Is Your Provincial Certificate," so I had gotten my GED and my provincial certificate, so that was that. Sita

> I think the Project opened areas for me that I didn't know that I could access - more education. I never ever thought I could go back to college. Stuff like that - or how to go about applying for certain jobs, making contacts, networking. It did provide me with needed skills. Becky

> I'm not afraid of SFU anymore. I have all the confidence in the world that I can make it, that their program isn't any different than doing five or six courses a semester in this school. Colleen

2. Discovering Themselves (Psychological and Social Impacts)

Learners described the psychological and social impacts of having participated in an ABE/Literacy program as equally important as, or more important than, the educational impacts. While they had entered a program with the hope and plan of gaining skills, they were surprised by the changes they experienced within themselves and how they related to the world.

People gained a great deal of self-confidence:

> I used to be a quiet person. I'd sit in the corner and you wouldn't even know I was sitting there. Now I'm able to talk to other people and communicate with them. Really exciting. I haven't lost anything, just gained. Before I wouldn't be able to talk to anybody, it's really a great experience for me. Randy

> Being out of school for so long, my confidence wasn't at the highest. Now I feel very confident, that I can get into any kind of course and be successful at it. And I think it helped train my mind to do that now because I did start there in August, and besides studying for the GED, I

> was involved with the newsletter, the magazine they have there...I contribute to that, writing some poems and also putting it together and doing a little tutoring. All those things combined, they just build up your confidence, and I'm ready, I can't wait, I'm very eager for this thing to start. Pierre

> When you are going to school you get all these wonderful ideas of, "OK if I do this then I could go off into this area and do this." I always tried to keep all my doors open so I can go to any one any time...It gave me a sense that I can do better. I have done better. Milton

> People are looking at me a little differently now that I have that education. It's a good feeling...Before I would go into a group of people I didn't know, I would get stomach cramps like you wouldn't believe. I am able to enter into that same group now with a different outlook. Yes, I would put that credit towards ABE. Winston

> I wasn't secure, never reassured myself on things, I always felt I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that...Now I'm more secure, I don't stop and think that I'm not as good as she is. In fact I know more than they do, because I went to school. Given me more self confidence. That's why I was able to try for a job [which she got and kept for 3 or 4 months,] Gave me the courage to at least go and ask for a job and see if I was qualified. Shilona

> I think it gave me a lot of courage, and that whole experience of going to ABE said to me that, "Yes, you can do it, you just have to set your mind to it and pursue it", which I never had before. To me, that was an example of what a person can do. When I started and when I finished, that's two different people. This whole path of that fourteen months showed me that I can, and that I'm not dumb. If I can, the way I felt here, if I could have done that, anybody can do anything. Donna

> Even after treatment my self-esteem was pretty low. I was beating myself up all the time and stuff. And just being here, and achieving so many things, and just - small achievements and stuff, but they mean a lot - speech crafts, just winning an award, and stuff like that. Sam

They now have the ability to assert themselves:

> It's just unreal how I thought that I could never do that. I just phoned her everyday and told her that I need this job, I need it and I can't do without it, and she called me! I was surprised. Even right now I went to the recycling center, and they told me they would call me, I told them I need a job, and now I have even hope for that job. Melissa

> I was a loner. I'm not a loner now. I talk to everybody. If they stop and ask for directions, have a problem, I'll help them out with it... Before taking those courses you couldn't get me to open my mouth for nothing. Heather

> I credit the instructors - the gentleness, the way that they take you through it. You have to be a certain type of instructor. You can't overly mother and you can't under mother. We are like lost souls, lost souls who have lost our identity. If it hadn't been for Adult Basic Education and being allowed to go to night school, for the education world to open up to us people who never could finish school, it has been a miracle. We have become assertive people. Barb

ABE has given people the confidence and motivation to learn:

> From that point on it just felt great. From that point on I felt I'm somebody. I always remember the person who said that but it was really a combination of a lot of people that made it happen. It made me want to do more... Jarrett

> I almost find learning addictive...When I first went to ABE I found that there was almost a blockage in my mind. There was just a wall and I kept banging into it. "Why can't I remember? Why can't I understand?" I would read a paragraph and I couldn't remember what I read. I think you have to break a barrier in there somewhere. It was so frustrating, you can't remember anything. You read a paragraph, if you have questions on it, you can't remember what the paragraph was about. I think it was the whole combination of low self-esteem, being afraid, the whole combination of things, and I think that interferes with your learning. Donna

They have the strength to accept their own and other people's mistakes:

> I know what I do I do well. I don't have to think, "What if I make a mistake?" If I make a mistake, fine. It's not the end of the world. Before if I made a mistake I would say the hell with it and forget it. Jarrett

> Before I couldn't recognize the mistakes I was making, it was always the other person that was making mistakes. Now I recognize there are mistakes I make, that I have to realize, and I have to listen to that person tell me the mistakes I make, whereas I would never listen to that. "No, I don't make mistakes." That's all there was to it. Now, I listen to them, and that was one good thing too about the course because the teacher always almost everyday took out half an hour, maybe an hour just to give us that training. I thought that that helped me quite a bit. I never used to recognize that I have mistakes too. Melissa

> After I took the class I knew what other people were feeling. I am more understanding, don't ridicule people when they make a mistake. In the position I have now I manage people. I will allow them the ability and opportunity to solve the problem themselves, and if they can't I will help them. They experience the satisfaction of having that when I was in ABE. I do it for other people and I find it gets far better results. Tom

Many are now self-assured enough to try new things:

> [ABE] helped me take on challenges. A lot of times fear held me back. Even though I am still fearful when I go into things, every time I do something new I get less fearful. Just learning about myself and learning that I can do things. Knowing that I am a valuable person helps me constantly achieve new things and allows me move forward and take new steps I would never have taken before. Ruth

> It got me more motivated, going out and trying new things. Jason

> I guess what's most important to me is not being afraid to do stuff, and just the confidence it gives you. Betty

People spoke of increased awareness of self and identity:

> Adult Basic Education seemed to be set up in a psychological way. Because it had some psychological stuff in it, like some of the material we read. I was reading this material and I was starting to think, "OK, these people live like this and this is the way I live and I was exposed to different people and seeing how their lives were like, and them being in relationship or being married, and how they were interacting with their spouse, and I started looking at my own life and seeing where I was at in my own life, and where I was at with this person. And then I started realizing that it was not too good. I guess ABE helped me in that way.
> Agatha

> It wasn't just learning math and English. It was a lot more. Deal with this part of your life. I think that is why that English course was designed for that. I think the instructor was really good. She sort of led into certain parts, and she could sense what the soft spots were, and she'd open that up, and you'd go, I didn't know I felt that about that'. That's priceless, that kind of stuff. You don't get that in school. I think it is a lot more than just going to school, [more] than learning academics. Donna

> I think I learned more from the lifeskills courses than I learned from anything else in the course. I learned about me and that I am a valuable person and making myself feel better about me has done incredible things... It was hard for me too because I didn't want to talk about myself. I didn't want to know or admit things about myself. I didn't want others to know things about me. There were a few times when I refused to take part in things. And that was just fear. Just learning about myself and learning that I can do things. Knowing that I am a valuable person helps me constantly achieve new things and allows me to move forward and take new steps I would never have taken before. Ruth

> It made me realize a lot of things I did not know about myself. For instance, I was not confident at all. I was a nervous wreck before...I know if I hadn't taken the course I probably would still be waitressing. It just made me realize that I can go back to school. It gave me the boost I needed to re-educate more. I'd have to say it opened the door...I didn't

> really know what I wanted to do, and to tell you the truth, I probably wouldn't have ever known if I hadn't taken that project. The people were really supportive. Becky
>
> The part that was really beneficial to me was the cultural classes. The drum making and the beading, and all those things. Being brought up in the city, I was in between cultures, I didn't really have one. I knew I didn't fit in with the white culture. I was told that from the time I was born here. And I really didn't have any Native background, except for my father, but he talked about growing up on the trap line, but it wasn't particularly about his people, it was about the trap line. I didn't know anything about that. In fact I've learned more about it, well obviously since I've been here, I've had to do research for a button blanket, and plus my interest was peaked about my own by coming here. How I found out was through an anthropologist at UBC. I asked him about our creation story, and I was kind of resentful, but I had to ask him these things. I was glad to get that information, and I used it on my button blanket. And the fact that they taught us how to do so-called Native things. Then I felt more like I belong somewhere. If not with a particular tribe, at least with the people. I belong somewhere. I'm one of the group. Colleen

With confidence, people often regained their personal integrity:

> It is really important to come back to school. It is nice that they have ABE. If they didn't have that, people like me wouldn't get confidence out there. It gave me confidence. It let me be me. It let me be honest with myself to just myself. I know that before I used to go in a bank, and I would try to pretend. I never told the truth, that I couldn't write, and now I am very honest. I go there and say, "Could you please help me, I have problems. I have problems with my spelling." Before I came back to school, I wasn't honest with myself. I tried to hide all the time. That is what ABE gave to me, it gave me confidence. Because I've seen other adults like me that never went to school that are trying. I've seen that there were other adults that were worse off than me, that couldn't even read, and I was well ahead of them in that area. I read very well, I understood what I was reading, so I guess it gave me confidence. Nina

For the first time, some people have developed a sense of well being:

> Without ABE the writing would have happened because I had to write, but all the other changes I don't think would have happened. Again the understanding instructors were just great, the support you get from them. It made me want to learn. I should have had this long ago...I feel great about me. I can go home and go to bed and sleep...no problems...It's just a different way of life and its good. Jarrett
>
> I have a great time. I get along with people a lot better. You don't have to fight with them everyday. Taking these courses sure helped a lot. They got me into reading and writing and taught me who I am. And made me feel a lot better. Martin

> I'm pleasantly busy. I'm achieving. I'm working. You know I'm working toward something I feel like I'm constantly growing and working towards it. Becoming a better person. Ruth

People have overcome some negative habits and learned effective strategies for handling their feelings:

> It brought me out of some bad habits, I don't smoke any more...and I don't go for a drink anymore...How? It made me think. Shilona

> [ABE] taught me not to drink as much. Milton

> Now if I get frustrated I can work through it and come home and deal with it or deal with it there. Not let it effect me so badly. Or come home and talk to friends. I don't have to stop that very second and get out of there. I've learned that I can work through it and wait and deal with things when it's appropriate to. Ruth

> We used to do assertiveness training in the class with each other, and that helped me a lot. Just for no reason at all, I want to be alone, and I tell the person there is no way I have time for you. That's it. Even that helped me. I couldn't believe it but that helped me quite a bit. Melissa

> I think the upgrading program [ABE] made me more aware of how people deal with things. Some of the people within the class, including myself, didn't always deal with things on a positive level. Like my biggest problem within myself was anger, confrontation. So I was learning a lot of social skills within the class and I was also lucky to have an instructor who was really a caring person. Agatha

> Thinking good has come about because of the upgrading. Because you just don't jump in anger because now you know a little more. It's a great feeling. I could have responded in anger. But a lot of these people have helped me. It did help my attitude in up-grading. Confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness, all these come about without having the anger. They all had to do with going back [to school]. Learning how to behave in the world. Jarrett

> Even in that English, it is amazing how many frustrations through life a person has, and they're brought out. Some of them would surprise us. I didn't realize that it bothered me that much. They helped me bring it all out. The English instructor did that, and it was great. There were one or two students that were a bit angry with that English. I don't think they were ready to explore themselves deeply. That was a real exploration of self, I think that was fantastic. Donna

The ABE experience also had impacts on people's relationships with family and friends:

> I always used to be angry about the native and the white issues, but I noticed that I had something to back my anger up with. Then I started to look at things from all different aspects, because that was what they were teaching us to do. I stopped being so angry. The program also helped me with that because I got to know white people, and I thought, "Oh gee, they're human too." Before that my life did not involve white people. The only white people that I knew were social workers, and teachers. They were a part of my life because they had to be, not because I wanted them to be, or because they wanted to be. I did have one white friend that I had grown up with since birth, and that was the only one. Actually I have a white mother and a white sister, who is totally white. I didn't consider them in the picture. So that dissipates what I was learning in the program. They actually weren't out to get me. I can now see them as individuals, where before there was one big mess. Colleen

> I started realizing what people I wanted in my life and what people I didn't want in my life. Before I was feeling a need for people and just sort of being with anybody... Agatha

> Friends, definitely. When I was with her dad for 8 years, I didn't have any friends. And then I was finally able to leave him and I didn't have anybody. Then I went to school and I have lots of friends now. I have lots of support. That was a big thing for me. Debbie

> When you change a lot there are some things you have to let go. And I still love them and they are still my friends, but I don't think I'm better than them, but I think myself...You have to go on and sometimes make new friends even though it hurts and it's hard to do. It's hard to leave these people that you love behind, but I think I had to do that for myself. It's very hard when you are trying to grow and trying to achieve things to surround themselves with people who are comfortable with where they are and don't want to keep on. I don't maintain a close relationship with them anymore. I've built new relationships with people who are also themselves trying to learn and achieve and are doing the same things that I'm doing. It's easier when you have that support there; have the same things in common with those people and have a support system there. None of the old friends have followed suit and changed their lives. That's been a very hard part. But I know that I can't live to be the way they want me to be or for them to be comfortable with...I can't stay the same person so that they are comfortable with that. Ruth

While some marriages fell apart, other spousal relationships were strengthened:

> I feel really good now. At least I am not staying in a relationship that is abusive anymore. I'm out now. I know I can do it on my own...I feel

> great. Things started changing when I went back to school. If I wasn't back in school I don't know if I would have made that final step.
> Cynthia

> He thought that with me going back and getting educated that I would leave him in the wind somehow, like you're getting to smart for me and you're thinking you're better than me. He's gotten over that hump now...He was worried, "You're going to get a better job, you're not going to want to be married." I think my husband knows that I could take him or leave him. Becky

> I still have a relationship with my daughter's father. We've known each other since I was seventeen. I don't know what his idea of me was before but I'm starting to get a little view of it. But it seems to be changing and he can't believe how smart I am, and he'll say that. He hasn't read any of the essays I write, but he's read one letter that I was forced to write to my Band. He thought that somebody wrote that for me, and I told him that I wrote that myself. He said, "The school really helped you, didn't it?" I said, "I used to think the same way, I just didn't know how to write it down." Our relationship is changing. He is sort of listening to what I have to say now. He thinks that it might be something worth listening to. Not that we are really tight or anything but I see that he is being a bit more respectful towards me, which helps with him and his daughter. Colleen

> Even my husband, he loves to volunteer. Before he had no idea of what he wanted to do. The course helped him like it helped me and he wasn't even going to it. When I would study and tell him what happened and everything, he would get to thinking, you know...We never opened up before. He never talks all day. Now he really has an interest in everything: what I'm doing, what the kids are doing, where we're going, why we're doing it. And then he'll want to go along and see if he likes it... With the kids, before we didn't take them anywhere...[Now] we go to picnics and museums and stuff like that we never went before. That was because my husband didn't want to go, and I didn't know how to get him to go. Then I just decided I was just going to get and take the kids. Then he decided that he wanted to come along! The course helped me in more ways than I can tell you. Melissa

Often children benefited from their parents' ABE experience:

> I have only gained. I haven't lost anything. I have gained everything. I'm still gaining. I'm glad I went back. I really am glad. It was hard, but it was good. Now I can help my kids higher than I ever could. I keep telling my kids it's important. You have to have your education. Hilda

> It helped me quite a bit because it helped them quite a bit. Before they thought studying just wasn't "in" these days. I have an eight year old, and he is really slow. In the evenings when I settle down to study, he is going to settle down with me to study on the table, we are going to study for an hour, no matter what happens. All the TVs are off. Even

> my three year old and five year old, they are going to write ABC or whatever, but everybody is going to do something. Melissa

> I would do that with my children...the encouragement, it doesn't have to be telling them how to do math, or do something else, it was just in everyday life, a different approach to something. I use it still. I use it anywhere I can. It has just sort of become part of me. Donna

People have become role models and are influencing others:

> There's two or three other friends that got started in it [ABE] since. So by talking to other people I actually got other people interested enough to get into it. Even my sister-in-law got into it. Hilda

> My family started to notice it, my children picked up on it, and we all did homework together, and I can remember someone asking me something about algebra, and being totally absolutely amazed that I could do the calculations, and demonstrate the steps and everything, They were so impressed. Sita

3. Acting in the World (Community and Economic Impacts)

Former students described a growing awareness of their neighborhood and community. Some became active about social issues or participated in the political process for the first time. Some got jobs and others started doing volunteer work. Upgrading their skills and increasing their confidence has affected many students economically.

Many discovered that they had something to give:

> I find that I can speak up. I've got myself into a hospice society, which before I don't think I would have. I've always been inclined, sort of fascinated with certain aspects of life, and through hospice society I'm sort of fulfilling that for me and giving of myself, which I don't think I was able to...I wasn't able really to give of myself...Before I don't think I'd be able to do that because I feel that I couldn't express myself.
> Donna

Many people started doing volunteer work:

> In my life right now I'm a member of a number of different things. It's all volunteer work through the Union. They are varied activities...Also I'm preparing for a presentation to the Workmen's Compensation Board on their proposed changes to safety regulations. Also I'm getting dollars for diabetes campaign organized by Canadian Building Trades, taking place across Canada on the same day. Also I'm active politically, two ridings for provincial and federal. Peter

> I had the long term goals and it just seems like being here I have been in touch with so many different programs that are just part of my stepping stones to my goal, things just seem to keep happening. A few of the street workers approached me about setting up a dance group for the young kids in the area, because there are a lot of kids interested, and that is a field I want to get into, working with youths and stuff. Sam

> When I went to [ABE], I got so I wasn't scared to ask questions about different things, which I was before. I would never have joined the Legion and do volunteer work until I went to college and that. Vera

Some have become more aware of community issues and politics:

> I have become more interested in politics...Knowing what's going on in politics and what's going on in my country. I have become more aware of it. I haven't been involved or done anything...I'm realizing the importance of participating as a person. To see what I want done I have to participate and become more aware of things and go out and vote which I did this year too...which I've never done before... Children's laws really need to change, more so than women's. I'm absolutely shocked and disgusted by the rights that children don't have...the way children are treated. I've been learning a lot more about that lately. My beliefs of that have become very strong. Whereas before they didn't matter because I didn't think about it. I'm a sit in the corner, let somebody else do it kind of person. I have been. Just being right in my face is almost forcing me to say this is what I believe. And that's great.
> Ruth

The ABE experience affected their relationships with their children's schools:

> A year after I left [the college program], I did a reading program at school. My kids were in elementary school, they had a lot of kids that just needed one-on-one reading, and I don't think I would have ever done that if they had asked me before I went to school. Just because I didn't read a whole lot before other than kids' books. I wouldn't have been confident enough. Rachel

> Before they never told me what happened at school, what they did. Now they can't wait to tell me what happened at their school. I wasn't as interested in their work before either. Now I want to know, sit them down, even at supper that is what we talk about. What happened at your school? What did you do at your school? It helps the kids to open up. I never did that before...[We asked her if her relationship with her daughter's teacher had changed since she went back to school]. Yes it has. Before I only saw her as a teacher, now I see her as someone trying to teach my kids. I don't know actually how to put this in words. I can't say I see her as a friend either, she's a teacher, but then again, I'm a teacher too, right? Our relationship has changed quite a bit... When I go there, now I talk to her about my daughter, the other children, and I know what is going on in the school. I never knew that before. I never went to the meetings, I never did any of those things. All of this and I was raised here in Canada. Melissa

> I felt very young and was a very young mother and wasn't confident. I was even scared to go to her school. I was scared to talk to her teachers. I never went to talk to her teachers. I never did anything, I was scared. I cared about her schooling but I didn't care about the school. It's helped me become more aware of what the schools are doing and put a lot more value on them. I've actually been to her school a few times and done things - met the teacher. Ruth

People feel the ABE experience has prepared them and given them access to jobs:

> Having a GED, I have a better chance of getting a job now. To me this is the biggest thing. Now I'm more secure. Vera

> I think the Project opened areas for me that I didn't know that I could access - more education. I never ever thought I could go back to college. Stuff like that - or how to go about applying for certain jobs, making contacts, networking. It did provide me with needed skills. Becky

> I went out looking for jobs on the bulletin boards and I could read what it said on them. And that made a big change, like I couldn't read those before. Martin

> I never knew how I could get a job...I knew that everything I was not doing, for once, when I went to an interview, I was a nervous wreck. They asked me what was my name, and I forgot even that. This training course helped me quite a bit. To learn this, like what I wanted, to tell the employer what I am looking for, this is what I can do for you, and this is what I want done for me. Whereas before I would be thinking, "What is it that I want?" I had no idea what I wanted. Now I know exactly where I'm going, and when to get there, and how to get there. Melissa

ABE has given people a start:

> That was the first step to my education, and for him [my son] to see me finally getting an education, I mean education is something. When he said that I had only went to grade 8, that was like he was trying to shame me, and it worked. I was ashamed, I was embarrassed that I didn't have an education. I wasn't qualified to do anything and he knew that. The fact that it would get me off of welfare, and the fact that I achieved it in ten months, I got those certificates, and then to go on and to do it again one more time, this year I made it again. But if I hadn't have, it would have been quite devastating for me. But, yeah it has changed because he can no longer say that you only have grade 8, you are going no where. The fact that he is finally proud of me, that he doesn't try to hide, he doesn't tell me how to dress, if I feel like wearing jeans, it doesn't bother him, and he seems to be quite comfortable with bringing his friends over now, he doesn't tell people that he lives in the houses over there. The fact that my income had gone up a bit, not terrifically, but a bit compared to welfare, that I have been able to make the house look a bit better... Colleen

> For the education world to open up to us people who never could finish school has been a miracle. We have become assertive people. We are no longer the mothers our mothers were. When her husband died my mother was devastated. When Daddy died he was 52, she was 42. When he died there was nothing for her. She didn't have an education and she still had all of us to care for. There was no way for her to raise them except to go on social services because there was nothing. And my generation was following into the same track and then somebody, whoever that person was, decided that adults can come back to school to be retrained, so they wouldn't fall into the crack of going on to welfare because they have lost a partner. Barb

People have became participants in the economy:

> I have stuck to my decisions that I made while I was in the course. I told them that I was going to open my own company. I did. I have my cleaning company I opened. I'm doing contracting, cleaning, taking buildings for cleaning and stuff like that. I've come a long way. Before I never would have been able to do that. Melissa

> I got a job shortly after completing [the program]. My husband was laid off and our family needed my income for the extended period of time...I got a job at a flower shop after completing my grade 12. So yes it made a difference. Maybe it wasn't necessary to do the job, but it was the deciding factor for the employer. Rachel

> My son John also got his GED and is now working as a fireman at an international airport. Barb

> [I wanted to] do something other than waitressing because that's nowhere, that's straight to nowhere really. I make $120 a day now, and I'd have to work how many days for that? I'd get more tired, I'd work as a cashier at that candy store at the mall, and I would get so tired I would come home and just collapse for $40 a day. This is ridiculous. Now I get tired at work, it's heavy work. I come home sometimes and crash out too, but it is really rewarding. I learn something new, I meet different people, I learn new skills, I learn something about medical problems everyday. To approach patients you have to have communication skills, you have to speak with the head nurse, I just love it. At times when I'm working and I'm so peaceful. I'm doing my own thing, I'm concentrating on what I'm doing, and if I have to report something, I'll be afraid, but then I'll just go do it. I think that will always stay there always. Donna

Some people are making more money:

> I could have made a lot more money by getting a job rather than going into ABE. But if I hadn't sacrificed roast beef for peanut butter and jelly I wouldn't have got through marketing, wouldn't have got my degree or the job I've got today with the possibility of a better job to come. How can you lose by learning? I'm 28, I'm making relatively good money, in a home, everything that I should want. My abilities have paid me. I ran

> into somebody I used to chum around with when I was 18 and he hasn't changed one iota. He is going on 30 years old and he is no where. Being able to drive down the street in my car that I paid for by going to ABE, getting into college, is a good feeling. Tom

For others, ABE has had little impact on their income:

> There has been no major increase in my income. It's still under $20,000. I was getting $12.00/hour moving furniture in Fort St. John. Wages are lower down here. I'm still doing labouring jobs. I'm still the same person. I just have a piece of paper that says I have a grade 10 now. Milton

For some, entering the mainstream economy has even meant a decrease in earnings:

> I lost a lot of stuff, but it is positive. I had to lose it. At this time I find that I am struggling with bills, and everything else, and it would just be so easy to go back into selling dope, and there are times when I think about that. I'm even making new friendships. All my life all I knew were ex-cons and drug dealers and addicts, and it is a big change, I mean I'm making friends now with people that I thought I'd never hang out with. It is real different, but it is good...a whole change of attitude basically. I've got less money actually like where in the last seven years of my drug addiction... Sam

While still others have learned to place less value on material success:

> To me, right now, material success doesn't mean as much to me as educational success. I still want to succeed and I still want to be rich, but being rich isn't one of my priorities - helping other people is important to me now. These students helped me realize it. Kevin

Many people have increased expectations now and a new sense of what is possible in the future:

> Yeah, I want to be a teacher's aid. One of my dreams, well a couple of my dreams. I really want to be a librarian. I'm working in the library. I was volunteering for four months, and now I am working. They started paying me. They thought that they probably weren't going to get rid of me, they might as well start paying me! I thought it was really thrilling to hear. To me it was never like I wanted to work for money for them, because I was getting just as much out of it as they were. Melissa

> I can't just stay at home and be a mother anymore. I have to get a job now. After I finish this massive education thing, I have to go out and get a job, and that means that I won't be able to spend the time I enjoy spending at home. I can't go back. Hopefully, I haven't done all this for nothing! If it doesn't get me a job, then something is seriously wrong.
> Colleen

> The biggest effect for me is that I'm actually eager to get to school and start this course. I've never been like that. I'm one of those guys that could make my living with no education if I really wanted to. For instance, I could be a salesman. I do once in a while. I will go buy something and resell it. I often do that, maybe scope out something in the paper, and make some quick money. I could talk my way into a job, but now I am actually looking for a career rather than a job. I actually feel that I am part of the driving force now, whereas before I kind of felt that I was a burden on society. Kevin

B. Those Who Were Not Well Served By The ABE Experience

Almost all of the former students interviewed described their experience of participating in a program positively. As expected, many also had some minor criticisms and suggestions to offer instructors and institutions.

Two of the people interviewed, Arlene and James, described experiences of not being served well at all. In Arlene's case, after multiple efforts to continue her education, she is frustrated, depressed and yet still searching for an opportunity which fits her goals, learning style and financial needs. On the other hand, James remains confident in his management abilities and successful life. However, he continues his search for someone who will help him overcome his learning disability and help him learn to read. The following presents their stories in more detail.

Arlene

Arlene saw a TV announcement about this study and called to make an interview appointment. She wanted to express her frustration and hopefully find out where she could get some help. Arlene has made several attempts to improve her reading and gain the knowledge and skills she needs to get a job and enhance her life. Because of her situation, she requires financial support while attending an ABE program. Therefore, she went to an Unemployment Insurance office for advice and support. The counsellors there advised her to attend Canadian Job Strategies programs because she could gain a marketable skill and receive a living allowance while attending. She tried three programs. None of the programs she attended responded to her individual style and needs. She is presently on welfare. When we tried to help her get into a more appropriate program after the interview, all the programs were either full or closing for the summer.

> I find school real real difficult. I'm one of those people who find it too formal a situation a lot of times. I don't think that I'm stupid but I know that I have a memory retention problem. I can grasp a lot of ideas real real quick when it's a hands-on situation.
>
> [As a child] I must have wanted to go to school. I quit Grade nine three times. When my initial classmates finished, I just couldn't understand how they could do it. I just couldn't keep it together. I wasn't patient enough. I couldn't speak my mind. Finally I decided to quit.
>
> About eight years later I decided I wanted to take up woodworking. When I was in high school I wasn't allowed to do stuff like that. I quit drinking and did the school thing. There was a two year waiting list for woodworking [a Canada Employment Centre Job Training Program]. They thought it would be much better for me to go into upholstery. They said I would be working with fine furniture, but that meant upholstery. It was basically a line to pacify me, I realize that now. It was just to get me into a course. That didn't pan out real well. I never got a job with it.
>
> I took Grade 9 science, math and English with the upholstery course. They did teach me that if I had a question that I should ask it.
>
> I took the pre-apprenticeship auto mechanics course. I lied through my teeth to get in. I told them that I got higher grades than I got and that I knew something about cars and I didn't know nothin' about nothin'.
>
> I had done a lot of work in the social service area looking after blind people, handicap people, half-way houses. Volunteer and paid work. [There were] no training programs at these types of places. So I attended an upgrading/work training program [a Handicapped Services program at a college].

All three programs Arlene attended were funded through the Canada Employment Centre. She could not afford to attend without the financial support. In each situation she took ABE upgrading, lifeskills and job training. She is bitter about the experiences. Her previous work experience was not valued. No relationship developed with the instructors or other students.

I wanted formal training, my grades. I wanted to know that I could speak out my opinion and make it stick. I wanted to know how to express myself the way that they do but not have the same opinion as them.

[At the college] that was the first time I really saw people getting a formal education. I had wondered, where do people come up with this jargon all the time? You don't hear these words on the street. Where are these people getting these words? It dawned on me that most of the people I worked with were formally educated people. What is really fascinating is that they use the words and all think they all understand what each other mean. And I'm sitting there like bobbing in water, but nobody really knows what each other means. There are a lot of things that don't get discussed -- real issues.

I read probably a total of five books in my lifetime. I looked at a lot of pictures. I do some writing on my own, but as far as school stuff, no. In my mind the interest is there, but try to sit me down to do it. It stops there. For me to sit down to a book is really a strange thing. When I told myself I had to, I'd be up till two o'clock in the morning.

When you get a picture that's done in black, and criss-cross lines and white, and you look at that, I don't see how people can see just one thing out of that. It boggles my mind that they can only come up with one image of what that is. It's like looking at a cloud. I can see a whole lot of different things, just like when you're a kid, and it has never changed.

[We asked her what she was doing now] Nothing. Actually my life is going downhill in a real big way. I'm sort of walking a fine line right now. I'm really not in a safe place now in my life, with my work or with my attitudes and with my health. Everything is just sort of slipping out from under me I guess.

There are two things in my life as far as work that I've always wanted to do. One of them was music and the other was work in stain glass. I've never done either because I know I won't involve myself until I know I can keep going. I've never felt that secure so I don't start. Because I think that would really rile me if I had to quit those things once I got started.

[I am frustrated] not being able to get a job when I did get trained. Having my training, a lot of times, you end up bucking the system. [I] would like to see schools open 24 hours a day to accommodate all moods for learning. Also separate classes for quiet book learners and others for social interaction while learning.

The only thing you know about where you are going is that you are going to have a certificate when you're finished. But you haven't necessarily discovered where you as a person would go, and that is what we are all here for. It's not individual enough. And it wouldn't take that much to have people follow their own little streams.

> [I am] still motivated to learn but tired of it all. When I finished the course it didn't mean a thing. Not a thing. I was glad I could fix my own car but even that only lasted for a while because cars change and stuff. It's really been a big pacifier in a way. People felt I was doing something. I felt like I was doing something. It didn't go anywhere. And I couldn't care because there was nothing I could do with the caring...There's no point. It was wasted.
>
> Feeling comfortable with reading, I've been hoping to feel that for an awful long time and what I have done is I've been collecting books that I know I'm interested in. I've got a shitload of books that I've never read. Whole bunch on glass. Whole bunch on woodworking. English - I really like words. I like what a lot of people can do with words. Drama and art forms. There's a part of me that is so outside of that it's always something I'm looking at rather than something I'm in. Coming to some understanding of that would be nice. And if you keep in mind that I don't have that and you put this person in the school system, it isn't fair to the teacher or to the course or to the situation. And I guess that's why I harp on the fact that things aren't flexible enough for so many.
>
> [There are many] different kinds of people. I know I'm not the only one. [I] think courses provided students with superficial benefits, but not with outcomes more relevant to their deeper lives.
>
> I don't know how people have a chance anymore that really need help, and when there are people who want to help out there, how to get those two to meet in a way that works. For the most part it was real damn depressing.
>
> If I returned to school, I would like a whole gamut of courses like in high school, not just adult education English, science and math but music etc. Key thing though is the whole environment, not sure though. It would be scary to go back to school again now.
>
> The answer doesn't come from me and doesn't come from the education system, so what do you do shy of going to work for someone six days a week for nothing.

James

James immigrated to Canada in 1969. English was his first language. He had completed Standard II (about grade 8) in an English school system. His math was good but he always had problems in spelling and English. When he came here as an adult, he took correspondence courses for grade 10. Again, math was no problem, but he struggled with writing and English. In 1971 he passed the tests for grade 10, but still had problems in English and reading. In his opinion he basically guessed his way through. So he quit because he felt he was not getting any real help. Later he registered for a literacy tutor program, hoping that the one-to-one relationship would help him learn to read. After participating in the program three months, he still had not been assessed for a learning disability. He liked his tutor, but needed more specialized help. He left and is still hopeful that he will one day find the help he needs.

James is a capable, articulate and confident man in his late thirties. He is married with three children and manages a manufacturing plant. During the interview it became apparent that James has a learning disability. He has always written letters and numbers backwards. The interviewer gave him the name of a professional service for dyslexic people in his community.

Quite simply, James cannot read well. He has been promoted to manager a number of times but has had to give it up because of the paperwork. He has never hidden the fact that he cannot read well. When accepting his most recent management job, he made a deal. He manages the operations, others do the paper work.

> I always had confidence with what I know. What I didn't know is what I had problems with. I think that's what helped me quite a bit. I didn't bullshit my way around. I always said, "This is what I know and this is what I am capable of doing. Take me for what that is." That's the way I operate and that's what got me so far that I am today.
>
> I don't try to hide the fact that I have a problem reading. I never did. I know I have a problem but everybody else in the world has problems and this was mine. All the guys I work with know I have a problem. When I pick up a report at work and can't read it I turn to one of the guys and say, "You read it because I can't read it."
>
> I don't believe in bullshitting my way around. I shoot right from the hip. That's what I can do and that's what I am capable of doing. I don't see going around trying to do something you don't know how to do. I see a lot of guys even with a good education trying to do things that they don't know what the hell they're doing. If you don't know how to do it, just say you don't know how to do it.

James' main goal in getting tutoring was to improve his reading and writing skills to be able to get trade papers and sustain management positions to which he has always been promoted. He is extremely frustrated with his personal situation regarding his reading and writing skills.

> I think I would be very nervous going back to the classroom. But I'm getting to the point right now that I'm feeling strongly enough about it that I think I have to do that. Because everything else I tried didn't work. I'm at a crossroads and I have to do something.
>
> I'm not even reading newspapers. I pick it up and can read about two lines and then my eyes go blurry on me.

Driving is all right, but he has a problem in new cities reading signs. Luckily he feels he has a good internal compass. He has some difficulty with family business paperwork, but his wife handles most of it for them. He owns a lot of property and has had a number of business ventures. He depends heavily on his wife to get along. He has been very successful economically and socially.

> The only thing that is really holding me back is the one problem that I have. I'm not afraid to admit that I do have a problem. It would be nice to find somebody that I can talk to that understands what I am going through and what I am doing. When I took this last course here I got pretty frustrated because it wasn't helping. It was going in but it wasn't registering. It didn't do me any good. I figured it was wasting my time and her time.

C. The Impacts As Expected By ABE Instructors

The study was interested in comparing what former students said the impacts in their lives have been with what instructors' thought the impacts would be. Instructors' expected impacts also clustered into areas describing educational and functional gains, psychological and social changes, and community and economic participation. The following instructor comments were typical:

1. Educational and Functional Gains

For the most part, if we are talking Grade levels, we would expect they might go up two years. Now, not everybody does, but some it is astounding how far they will go. It depends on what their experiences have been and what their needs are. Jeannete

We have a fairly high proportion of the group that will go and take their crack at the GED, the majority of them will be successful, either totally or partially, in terms of that. Wayne

For my students, some of them are working toward a certain goal and a certain level so that they can progress into a training program, maybe BCIT or community college. Margaret

My definition [of success] would be the ability to work and live using reading and math skills the way you wanted to. If you wanted to find out what was happening in the world you could pick up a newspaper. If you wanted to go to the store, look at the labels, you could handle the money. For different people it is going to be very different goals. Jeannette

The people who say "I went to the bank today". I feel just as good about that, in having helped them learn how to write a cheque, or add and subtract, so they don't get ripped off when they go to make change. I mean, to me that is just as much as success as the person who gets into job training, or moves ahead in their job. David

When I really feel success in literacy is when I have turned someone on to reading, when I can see kind of an excitement and kind of a world opening up, and to me that's what my goal is. And it's happened and it's wonderful. Once learners get that, the rest of it is easy, because they're excited and they want to learn. That's always been my goal and is a measure of my success and theirs too. Nancy

I find that the rewards from teaching them really good study skills are enormous. They are getting ten and fifteen percent better on all of their exams. They are more efficient learners. They are more efficient studiers. And I think it is worth the time to make them good students first and then give them the academics to work on. Sally

Where the learner feels that he/she has gained the skills they wanted. That's one of the major difficulties in accountability and all the measurable data that places like the Ministry wants to see. They determine success by how many students, or they would like to, completed a fundamental level, and went on to get intermediate. Or how many took a course and went out and got a job. If somebody comes in and signs their name with an X, and after 3, 4 months, however long it takes, goes out of there and can sign their name and address and phone number and use a phone book or something, I mean, why shouldn't that be regarded as just as successful? Or the person who wants to write a letter or read a book to their grandchild or, I think one of our difficulties is in making people who look at data understand that in literacy you can't say success is only this. Giselle

2. Psychological and Social Changes

I think people feel that they have more control in their lives, because they have improved their skills. Very often people have low self-esteem, you start working with them and maybe they realize that they can learn. That they are not stupid the way they were told they were, or the way they felt. And you literally see this person change in front of you because the confidence then allows them to move on even more quickly because they start to believe in themselves. I have seen a lot of that. David

I'm dealing with the kind of student who hasn't had a lot of success in academics and part of it is they have always been told they'll never be successful at it. So you have to build from the inside out. Over the years I've watched students and when we've done the building from the inside out they are really successful. I can see a big change in them from when they have walked through the door and when they leave at the end of the year. And sometimes I think that change is more important than having finished a math course or that kind of stuff. Sally

I guess when they're shining. They shine, that's the first one, that's feeling, I operate by feeling, of course you could get laughed at but… A young man today showed me stuff he wrote about fear, and about feelings, and about recovery because he's going through a lot of alcoholism, a lot of places, construction is no exception. He wrote it up and put it through a word processor, and it's beautifully and well written, and it wouldn't have been even six weeks ago. He's so proud, that is like immediate success, even though it might level out, these kinds of things, that's what I look for, I look for excitement or enthusiasm, it doesn't have to be loud, but it's there. Linda

Things like I was saying this morning, where you can see people just, they're changed. I read somewhere that the product of a non-profit organization was changed people. You can see that happening. You see this happening, and you think, "Hey this guy, we might not see him tomorrow," but he's changed because of that experience today. That is success to me. Another fellow that he's burned himself out on dope, but hey, he gave his speech today, he came in late, but he came in, got up and did it, and talked about being a foster child, and this is the longest he's talked where he has made some sense, and didn't just disappear half way through it. That was success. In a way, it is just opening the door on a lot of painful stuff, which is probably holding him back. But still that was a tremendous success. He knows it, everybody was saying, "Hey, great speech," so that's success. Wayne

A lot of them live very, very lonely isolated lives that have been very difficult. And everywhere they have turned the choices they have made have not been the sort of positive ones somehow. And several of my students are really starting at base level again to try and do something, as they say in quotes "do something with their lives." So that "doing something", to them, is really measurable and then changes that I see are measurable, but I'm not sure outside the walls of the classroom. I don't know if you could say to a funding body "Oh, well so-and-so can, - he can actually carry on a conversation and pay attention and be polite and be there on time consistently, remember things." Well, we expect 10 year olds to do that and so from society's point of view I don't know how valuable that is for saying that a program has been successful, but I count it as a lot. I think the students see that, and their outlook on life becomes much different. Anita

I have a couple of students right now reading works in psychology, Wayne Dyer, how to talk to people and listen because they are interested in improving their communication skills. They are interested in psychology too because of what has happened to them. A lot of them are inspecting their lives and deciding how they can change it for their children and I think that is very important for society. Jeannette

Right away I would hope comfort about school. Confidence in themselves and have belief in their own intelligence in that environment. I would expect that to happen reasonably soon. I think that would be first. Then just awareness of learning, their awareness and ours of what's been happening in their lives. So then becoming aware too of how their lives with - one guy told me that when he took his little kid to the hospital, for the first time he read the word emergency, and knew what door without asking somebody, so those impacts, they happen quite quickly some of them, and that's neat to watch for. Linda

I have witnessed it happening where wives have taken more control over some of the things happening in their households and not putting up with some of the things that have been happening, and not putting up with the things that I have watched them put up with before. Once the persons began to feel better about themselves, there was shift in how they were dealing with people and at times the family may not benefit positively from it but the person does. Sally

Sometimes, by gaining power and there is no doubt about it, you are empowered when you are able to read and write. For primarily women, but it works that way for men as well, be completely dependent on their spouse, write cheques, banking, drive the car. And there's a lot of power involved that the other spouse has to give up. And changes in personality that are positive from my point of view, and hopefully from the student's point of view are very threatening to the other person. For the most part that is what I have seen. Jeannette

Public speaking, if you've been a person who has been afraid to open their mouths and paid the price for not being able to do that, in terms of a job interview, or talking to your children, or your spouse, your children's teacher, or whatever, then you are functionally disadvantaged. If people gain as they are doing out there this morning, then it is really neat. Wayne

3. Community and Economic Participation

I see it as both the means of communicating with and participating in the larger mainstream society. It's obviously reading, writing, comprehension, communicating, all of those kinds of skills, but it is one of those things in which I see literacy as more than a sum of its parts. It's participation, it's feeling that you can participate in an equal basis with the rest of society. It's being able to formulate and articulate and express ideas, develop points of view, articulate points of view, it's access to a lot of what goes on in society. Susan

I'm hoping people will come out of our program as better community people - more interested and a more vital part of the community. But that works in different ways. That's not an academic thing for most people. Its a much more informal thing and has to do with developing evaluative skills and perspectives which come up more in discussions rather than course work. That's a less tangible thing in this program and again its not something that people want to focus on in an academic area. Bob

Tens years hence... I'm hoping that they are employed if that's their goal. I also hope that will still be learning in some capacity. I look back at some of my students of ten years ago and see that is true. I guess I hope that they are all good people. Sally

To get them back in the workforce. I think that we can never ever lose sight of that fact. That being an employed person does great things for our body and our soul. To help a person get into the workforce, to feel part of society and a contributing member and all that. To use education as a stepping stone is a very strong part of my agenda. Marg

In a way it almost seems slightly dishonest at times that, maybe that's not the right word, but it's maybe unfortunate that you see these people lining up for courses, and doing this and that, and for some people that is the first step in the way they go, but for most people it must be really disappointing to realize that they struggled and sweated to get to Grade 10 or whatever they did, and they are still unemployed. Hopefully they feel something in here [taps heart], you can't underestimate that. That is a contribution to society as well. Wayne

Go back to school and you will get a better job. But what happens to students with a lot of fairly low skill levels that come in, they don't intend to spend the rest of their life going back to school, and they get discouraged. You can be here in a literacy program for a year or two years, and really your marketable skills aren't any better than when you came in, and that's pretty discouraging for a lot of the students, and so they leave, and their lives - maybe they're better in the sense that maybe they have better access to some of the things that they didn't have before, and they feel more a part of the sort of the literate society, but in terms of their employability, they're not necessarily better off.

Susan

CHAPTER III — DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into three parts. Section A provides a summary of the impacts of the ABE experience on the lives of participants as they have described them. Comments on how those results compare to other outcome and follow-up studies have been included. The impacts reported by former students are briefly compared with the instructors' expected impacts. Section B contains the researchers' distillation of the impacts out of which evolved the essences of the participants' experiences. These essences are discussed in a conceptual framework. Section C considers the implications of what we have learned for the practical aspects of organizing and delivering ABE/Literacy resources.

A. Summary And Comparative Review Of The Impacts

As described in Chapter II, the impacts fall into educational, social and psychological, and community and economic categories. Essentially these same impacts are discussed in the three studies found to be most similar to the present study (Charnley and Jones, 1979; Darkenwald and Valentine, 1984; and Malicky and Norman, 1993).

1. Educational Impacts

In the area of educational impacts, people in this study generally learned many skills, among them reading, writing and mathematics. The other studies reported an increase in basic reading, writing, numeracy and communication skills, as we did. Actual grade increases have been reported from pre-post standardized tests (Malicky and Norman, 1993).

The present study results resembled those of the other studies as well in that those participants who were previous non-readers were most broadly and profoundly impacted by their new found skill. Many learned job related skills, not least of which was the ability to cope successfully in a work environment. Public speaking skills were particularly noted by a variety of people, especially by Aboriginal interviewees. In this study people gained a great deal of knowledge about the community and the world. Many people were streetwise before participating in ABE. They were fully "literate" in the limited context of their particular sub-culture. Others had developed ingenious ways of coping with their immediate and often tragic circumstances. Still others were very capable family and community members. However, many had had very little previous knowledge of how mainstream society is organized and functions. Former students appreciated this new information and have since applied it in their daily lives. In addition to the skills and knowledge gained, ABE participants learned strategies for processing information. They learned how to study, how to communicate ideas, how to solve problems, and how to transfer such strategies to their particular circumstances.

Many participants gained a new or renewed love for learning. Others had their curiosity piqued. Importantly for some, their experience resulted in certification of some sort, such as a GED or a Grade 12 Certificate.

2. Psychological and Social Impacts

In this study the most profound, positive impacts of the ABE experience have clearly been psychological. Many people would seem to have overcome debilitating self-concepts and dysfunctional behavior through their ABE experience. Participants gained confidence in many areas. They learned to speak out, to express an opinion, to ask questions, to accept mistakes, and to present themselves to others. They have enriched their lives. In some cases, they have turned them around completely. Clearly, under the right conditions, ABE can be a transformational experience for those ready to fully engage in it.

Many discovered and began to nurture a positive identity. They were able to develop a positive personal mythology replacing the negative one that had guided their lives for years. They began to discover their inherent self and self-worth. Through their accomplishments, they gained self-respect. Some spoke about living with integrity for the first time, no longer finding it necessary to hide their inability to read and their associated sense of shame. Some became self-motivated and self-determined. This often led to other positive actions such as removing themselves from cycles of dependency and abuse.

Some participants, having overcome their fears about engaging in ABE, found the experience validating. They realized they were not completely odd and alone in the world.

Participants often discovered a growing excitement as a positive picture began to emerge from their efforts. Most gave a great deal of credit to sympathetic and patient instructors and a nurturing yet challenging learning environment.

The sense of well-being that often evolved included a more positive view of the world with a more hopeful future for the participant. A world began to emerge that had positive possibilities, often for the first time. There was a greater feeling of personal security and sense of belonging. This change seemed to enable creative pursuits, empathy for others and the desire "to give, rather than always receive."

Participants learned successful lifeskill strategies. Chief among them were anger and stress management. They learned how to handle strong emotions and turn them into positive forces in their lives. Though often painful, self-reflection and analysis became a part of everyday life.

It was in this psycho-social realm that all the impact studies were on the same solid ground. Charnley and Jones (1979) made a strong point with which we agree:

> It is debatable, however, whether mastery of literacy skills is to be regarded as the measure of progress. In their view of the raw evidence, all three research associates concluded that the mark of the successful student was a gain in confidence, without which progress in the skills would not take place. What the students gained was a feeling of being made worthy, of being not an isolated instance of poor ability in literacy but one of many with similar problems. In the process of interaction with tutors and fellow students they were learning to value themselves, and to accept themselves, as never before; and this access of confidence was basic to any advance in the skills of reading and writing. (pp. 110-111)

Darkenwald and Valentine (1984) indicated that nine out of ten respondents at follow-up 12 to 18 months later, said that they felt better about themselves as a direct result of participating in ABE. This was the result from a feeling of improved academic skills and of personal accomplishment. According to these researchers:

> In view of the generally low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence among this population, these affective outcomes are of major significance. Not only are they important as ends in themselves, but they are requisites for continuing personal growth and accomplishment both in the classroom and the world outside. (p. 87)

Malicky and Norman (1993) found that the most common affective outcomes of ABE program participation mentioned by participants were increased confidence, coupled with increased self-esteem, being more comfortable in a range of situations or feeling proud of what they were doing. These sentiments echo the kinds of psychological impacts we have heard in the present study. Unlike our findings, however, Malicky and Norman (1993) reported that their changes in self-esteem did not result in lasting or significant life changes.

Why these differences? Our study was a retrospective follow-up with a basic entry criterion of at least a year away from a program. Many of the people who agreed to be in our study had been away from ABE programs for at least three years. Their stories often spoke of significant changes in their lives. There was also a sustained increase in self-confidence that enabled them to keep succeeding and expanding their possibilities. Malicky and Norman (1993) conducted a systematic, prospective one-year intake and two-to-three year follow-up. They followed all of the people from one year's ABE registrations. Perhaps this diminishes the possible picture of success compared to the present study's approach of contact with self-selected participants from various years. It may also be that Malicky and Norman's use of "drop-out" as an indicator of negative self-concept was not entirely warranted. This point will be explored further in the discussion of the high rate of ABE drop-out.

In the present study, it was found that all of these psychological changes, combined with new information and experiences, impacted social relationships. As might be expected, many people found that old friends dropped by the wayside and a new circle of friends developed. Often this included an expanded and mutually supportive social network.

It also became evident that some people had gained the ability to be more empathetic and tolerant of differing views, lifestyles and cultures.

This study also found that families were impacted both positively and negatively by the participants' ABE experiences: negatively in that a number of spousal relationships fell apart; positively in the enlightened sense that the ABE experience often provided a spouse with the inner resources to grow and move beyond an oppressive situation.

Children, who are often barometers of family health, appeared to benefit in a variety of ways from the direct positive impacts on the life of the parent participant. In the cases reported, the children apparently experienced less shame, more confidence and greater achievement. The parents interviewed often began to take an ongoing interest and became active participants in their children's education. This ranged from reading stories to them to assisting in local school programs.

ABE participants often became models for others to emulate. Family members and friends noticed the positive changes in their lives and liked what they saw. As well, many of the participants began to reach out and assist others during the experience, such as by tutoring.

3. Community and Economic Impacts

In the present study, a number of the ABE participants became volunteers in a variety of community organizations for the first time in their lives. Due to a sluggish economy, some could not find work and resorted to volunteering to "try their wings". (This has led to paying jobs for some.) Still others were simply acting out a more balanced and healthy view of community life.

Community participation was also addressed by Malicky and Norman (1993). However, they found social isolation in students because of the time and financial pressures of being back in school. In our study, for some students, gaining knowledge, understanding and confidence meant that they began to exercise their role as citizens. They began to pay attention to political and economic news. They voted for the first time. They became politically active in their community in formal and informal ways. Having learned about the plight of others and having experienced tragedy in their own lives, some used their newly discovered capacity to act to become advocates for those less fortunate. There seemed to be a long pent-up feeling of being a burden that needed to be released in the positive act of giving, of contributing to family, friends and society.

With regard to economic impact, there appeared to be some differences among the various studies noted. This may have been the result of the wide differences in target groups as well as the economic era in which the studies were conducted.

The present study did not have the kind of random sample of the ABE population that would have been needed for absolute evidence of increased employment opportunities as a result of ABE. The study was not designed as a statistical look at pre-ABE to post-ABE economic gains. We did record the participants' employment status at the time of the interview and their level of ABE involvement. (For details, see Table 9, Appendix B.) We found that about one quarter of our former ABE participants had employment of some kind; one third were still students; and one quarter were unemployed. However, the proportion of people who were unemployed dropped steadily from the fundamental to the advanced level.

Charnley and Jones (1979) did a study of the implementation of a nation-wide literacy campaign in the 1970s in Britain. They cautioned that their research period may have been too short to document great changes in the subjects' economic situation. According to them, "a few students got better jobs, a few took up new activities or interests, but these were the exceptions." (p. 111) Similarly, Malicky and Norman (1993) concluded that:

> there was no evidence in this study that increased literacy and education lead to improved employment opportunities. Individuals generally returned to the same low paying, temporary jobs which they had before they entered the literacy programs. (p. 39)

A much brighter picture was reported by Darkenwald and Valentine for New Jersey (1984). Sixty percent of those who were initially unemployed and seeking employment obtained jobs. Forty-five percent of those who were initially employed obtained better jobs.

In the present study, a number of participants were able to "get off welfare". In some cases they broke a cycle of dependency that had continued for two and three generations. Some became self-employed. While some people were able to find their first job, others were able to change occupations and increase their earning power. Interestingly there were others who, having changed their economic lifestyle from criminal and "street" activity to the mainstream, sacrificed considerable income.

For those beginning at the fundamental level, learning to read definitely enabled them to access employment opportunities previously "hidden" from them. However, it would seem that the person who has spent one to five years moving from a basic reader to grade 8 equivalency, for example, has not yet reached the stage where significantly improved employment becomes accessible.

In addition, it is important to note that there were many who, despite the sacrifices, efforts and sheer determination to improve their lives through more education, were unable to report increased financial rewards, or even employment, directly related to their ABE experience. For them, it has become abundantly clear that the cultural myth—more education automatically leads to a better job—is heavily dependent on a vibrant economy that includes a full employment value system and strategy.

The change in expectations related to the economic climate is reflected in the words of one of the ABE instructors interviewed in this study:

> I think the long-term goal for most students is to get a job or get some further education so that they can get a job. But I don't think that is a reality any more at this point. I don't think we can make people believe that they are going to get a job if they get more schooling. I don't think that is fair to them because it might not happen. And I think it is a false hope if we are preaching that. And I don't preach that. I no longer believe that they are going to get work. I'll say, "Your chances are better, but there is no guarantee you'll get more work."

The last point in the comparison of findings in our study concerns the impact of the students' struggles and triumphs on the instructors. Charnley and Jones (1979) have described it as "the learning of the tutors".

> Very many of them spoke eloquently about their discoveries in their dealings with their students. They learnt about fellow men whose difficulties they had not previously imagined, about the remarkable resilience and adaptability with which those difficulties had been borne, about the shortcomings of an educational system from which they themselves had generally done well (some of them became very angry over this), and above all about their own reserves of tolerance and understanding. (p. 112)

Very similar sentiments were expressed by the instructors in our study and by one person particularly powerfully:

> Oh, it's been frustrating, but very rewarding personally. I work with a very special group of people. I have learned an incredible amount. Not just about literacy, but about my values. I think when I first started teaching, I had taught, but I think the world was fairly black and white before I got into literacy. I think the biggest thing I've learned is that the world is kind of grey. I may make judgments from my values, but I think I've learned not to judge people, and certainly never to judge students because you never know the circumstances they have been in. I know my thinking has changed and it continues to change. I think there is a lot of respect for all the people that I work with. I think we make each other think about things. You have to develop a social conscience working in this field. You cannot be affected by people's lives that may be totally different from the life you live, that you've always lived, from the values that you've grown up with. You have to be affected by the experiences that these people have. I mean most of the literacy students I have worked with know a lot more about life than I hope I ever have to learn. I don't know if I could cope tomorrow if I were suddenly on welfare, and these people do it and survive. We don't even stop to think about not being able to read a sign. And most of the public out there can't imagine what that is like. Unless you are working in the field, it is hard to help people understand the effect on people's lives, personally, their home life, work life, however they want to contribute to the community.

And further by another instructor:

> I thought I was respectful. But I've learned... like, try to be more respectful. We go out there thinking that we are being respectful, but we're not. That has been the biggest thing for me. You don't get training in that.

4. A Comparison With Instructors' Expected Impacts

It was interesting to note the instructors' comments about the impacts they expected to see from the ABE experience clustered in similar categories as had the impacts mentioned by former students.

The instructors placed particular emphasis on providing students with a place of safety and support. They also bolstered the students' sense of themselves as worthwhile and competent individuals. This emphasis was mirrored back in terms of the pervasive improvements in skills, self-confidence, and risk-taking reported by the ABE participants. The former students noted the tremendous difference these abilities had made in every facet of their lives.

The comparison of former students' and ABE instructors' comments showed that the impacts reported by the successful students were consistent with those expected by the instructors.

B. The Essence Of The ABE Impacts Set In A *Learning to Learn* Model

1. *Learning to Learn*: The Essence Of The ABE Impacts

Through all the educational, psychological, social, community and economic impacts, there are consistent fundamental threads that constitute the essence of the ABE experience for participants -- *people are learning to learn.*

Participants reported many instances of having learned concrete skills that they could apply and find helpful and practical. Perhaps of greatest psychological importance in the long run is that *people have learned that they have learned.* They now have the confidence that they can keep on learning on all kinds of levels throughout their lives.

This increased confidence has encouraged many individuals to enter into a spiral of successes in which "the essence of literacy is not language, but participation; only participation can develop a person's literacy" (Murphy, 1993, p.4). This seems to have been true of the people in our sample. For example:

a. Social literacy develops with social participation – People have described how wonderful it was to go out to dinner and hold their own in the conversation after keeping quiet for years and being afraid to make fools of themselves.

b. Political literacy develops with political participation – Other people found that they were interested in politics for the first time and voted.

c. Economic literacy develops with economic participation – People who had had intergenerational histories of welfare have begun to support themselves.

d. Cultural literacy develops through cultural participation – This was especially evident in the stories of native students whose exposure to native traditions, native playwrights and history from the native perspective has helped them find themselves, their roots and their identity.

e. Educational literacy develops with positive learning experiences – This has been illustrated amply in all the stories of those served well by the ABE experience who went on to further training.

What also seems to have been essentially and profoundly occurring across our study sample is that *people are gaining greater access to their own physical, social and inner world. This is enhancing their capacity for reflection, meaning and action.* The most obvious and dramatic examples of this process can be seen in people in our study who began at the fundamental level and who have learned to read for the first time.

Enhancing the capacity for reflection, meaning and action in people is what makes the potential impact of adult basic education at any entry level so profound. There are some who would say that better access to one's *own inner world* is at the heart of literacy. The stories we have heard reveal that the ABE experience has encouraged people to learn and reflect on their learning; to feel and reflect on their feelings; to act and reflect on their actions. All of this allows them to imagine other and future learning, feelings and actions for themselves.

For example, participants learned to capture and act upon their inner intent by making notes to themselves, i.e., planning. One woman came to the interview with a page of notes to cue herself about the things she wanted to say. This was a new and treasured skill for her that she was also using in many other situations. Another woman was enthusiastic about the benefits she was getting from keeping a journal of her feelings and ideas. She was learning a lot about herself that way.

The essence in both cases was that the ABE experience had expanded the realm of possible choices that the people could make to have more control over their lives.

When we can name the world and see it in print, it helps to hold it in our minds. Seeing the world in print allows people, in Freire's words, to "achieve some distance from their world and [begin] to recognize it." (Berthoff, 1987, p. xvii) Recognition is part of the knowing and understanding of the links and the relationships through which we make sense of things. This was particularly evident for those students whose ABE experience involved sharing their awareness and recognition with other students in the group. For example, one woman spoke of her shock as she "recognized" how different her experience as an individual female was from the experience of women around her. The lives and behavior of those women seemed to be dominated by their husbands, while she had a much more independent lifestyle. In another example, a native woman previously in conflict with the law began to read novels and plays written by Native writers. These offered her a new perspective and helped her to recognize threads in her own life.

Once we see something, we are able to evaluate it for ourselves and decide what to do about it. In Freire's words, we have the opportunity for "reinvention" of that something (Berthoff, 1987, p. xviii). This is an opportunity for new thought and action. It is a chance to exercise our capacity to change our situation. In our study, for example, reinvention was seen in those former students who began to use writing as a way of handling anger.

2. Developing The *Learning to Learn* Model

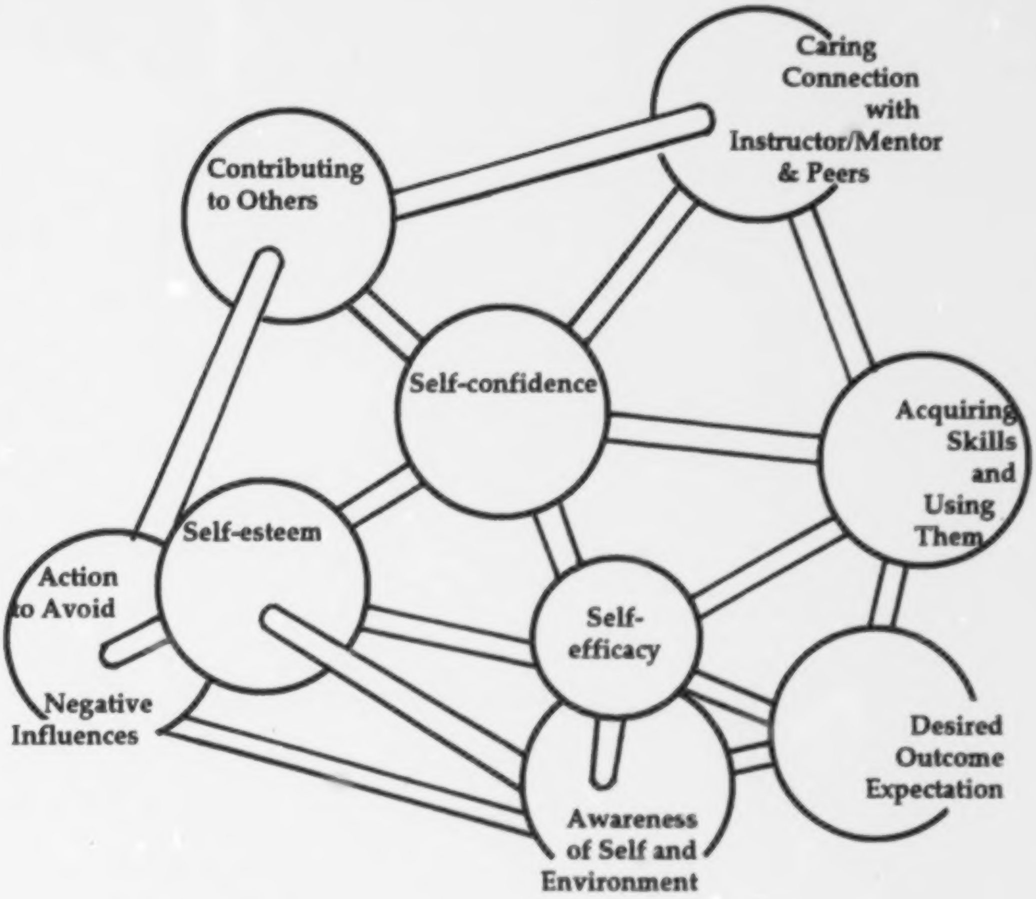
It is significant to know that the essence of a positive ABE experience is one that expands the possibilities for informed choice and action in the participants' lives. However, it is important to move beyond simply knowing what happened to try to understand why and how that process took place. It is with this conceptual understanding that program design and instructional practice can be improved.

A conceptual framework can be very useful: if it contains a good blueprint of those factors that are relevant to facilitating and nurturing learning and informed choice; if it fits the observations in the present study; and if practical implications for real world programming can be drawn from it. Our findings have suggested that the essence of the positive impact of ABE experience, i.e., *learning to learn*, is in fact made up of a number of important elements. Their relationship is not linear, but interactive.

Figure 1 depicts a model of *learning to learn* using the idea of a molecule. This molecule illustrates the way in which all of the important elements affect and are affected by everything else. Particularly important are the three elements of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy and how they affect the desired outcome. Self-confidence ("I believe I can do it") is nurtured and affected by a caring connection with an instructor and peers who believe in the students and help them to acquire and use skills that they are looking for. These same elements also foster self-esteem ("I believe I am worthwhile and I like myself"). Contributing to others and having something to offer also build self-confidence and self-esteem and in turn are affected by them. Both self-confidence and self-esteem are important for self-efficacy ("I believe I am capable of the behavior that will produce the outcome I want"). A separate but related idea is Bandura's (1982) concept of outcome expectation ("I believe there is a connection between implementing this behavior and reaching my desired outcome"). A solid belief in one's ability to do something that is logically connected to achieving what one wants can help achieve those skills and use them. Achieving one set of skills will bolster the belief that another set can be mastered and the expectation that the cumulative effect of building those skills will lead to one's desired outcome. In terms of overall impact, the more elements that are missing in a person's situation, the less positive the experience and impact is likely to be.

For most people in our study, the model of *learning to learn* ran as follows: the impact of acquiring reading, writing and numeracy skills enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, which influenced the ability to separate from past negative influences, to greater reaching out, and to independence and participation in the world. This in turn facilitated greater awareness of self and others, and offered choices which led to greater self-confidence. This enabled risk-taking and successful life-style changes. That is why the results at follow-up do not appear to be drastically different in content, if not in

Figure 1:
The Interactive Nature of the Elements in the Learning to Learn Model of ABE Impacts


Caring Connection with Instructor/Mentor & Peers
Contributing to Others
Self-confidence
Acquiring Skills and Using Them
Self-esteem
Action to Avoid Negative Influences
Self-efficacy
Desired Outcome Expectation
Awareness of Self and Environment

depth, from the results during participation. The positive impacts of ABE are radical in the best sense. *It is like turning on a light: things are never the same.* The nature of a positive impact from the ABE experience is that it is a truly "continuing, powerful influence" .

Chapter II included the stories of two former students who felt they were not well served by their ABE experience. A good model should help explain all of the results, positive and negative. It is of interest to apply the *Learning to Learn* model shown in Figure 1 to Arlene and James's stories. If we understand what was wrong, we may know how to correct the situation.

Arlene's original desired outcome was getting training for a job in woodworking. This was never supported by the ABE system. For purely financial reasons, on the advice of professionals in the system, she took a series of courses that were not related to her interests. None of them led to employment. Arlene described herself as a personally challenging individual with a unique learning style and a mind of her own. She expressed considerable frustration at not getting the course she wanted. She found that she did not really connect with either peers or instructors. This deprived her of important psychological support for herself, and the opportunity to contribute to others as a way of overcoming her negative self-image. The skills she did acquire in her courses did not bolster her self-confidence because she did not value them. Her sense of self-efficacy was not being developed because of the lack of connection between the skills she was learning and her desired outcome. She never got the chance to experience that she was capable of the upgrading and woodworking skills that would lead to employment in woodworking. She became more and more discouraged in a position of doubting herself and doubting the system.

What is needed for individuals like Arlene is an individually-tailored learning situation based on a comprehensive assessment of not only entry skills but a sense of how to capitalize on her learning style, strengths, creativity and needs. The assessment should also include how her needs are being met in other important areas of her life, especially those covered in the model. She would likely benefit greatly from a strong mentor/instructor relationship in an apprenticeship-like situation in her desired field to provide a challenging but nurturing and supportive environment.

James was in a very different situation. He already had a solid sense of himself as a result of a successful career and a strong marriage. He was clear about the connection between being able to read and achieving even higher levels of management of which he was capable. The ABE system did not provide proper support for increasing his self-efficacy—actually being able to read. The ABE system is not set up to routinely assess, assist and refer students with learning disabilities. What is needed for people like James is a technical as opposed to a social/psychological intervention. They need to have access to appropriate professional assessment and assistance to help them get on with the experience of *learning to learn.*

3. A Context for *Learning to Learn*

As we examined our findings in the fall of 1993, we were looking for key variables to help discern the nature of ABE impacts. We were also interested in what the catalyst was that sparked the whole cluster of life-changing factors. We realized that the kernel of possible change was sown when a person decided "I want my life to be better." We saw that returning to school was only one of many options that people could choose (e.g., marrying, moving, joining the military, etc.). We also realized that the probability of that kernel sprouting and growing depended upon a myriad of social and economic supports. It needed a friendly environment which would be essentially "the right people at the right place at the right time." However, for those who chose the ABE route, we were struck by the consistent expressions of courage, focus and determination in the stories of many students. They faced and overcame their fears and various obstacles in the process of returning to school. These phrases that dealt with "really wanting to" and "sticking with it no matter what" emerged as a variable we called intentionality.

We were very interested, therefore, when a short time later, a colleague directed us to a recent study on "living intentionally" (Balshaw, 1993). Balshaw's model was developed in a completely different domain. This was the area of family violence, with adult men who witnessed spousal abuse in their childhood but who remained nonviolent in their adult relationships. Balshaw's proposed theoretical model suggested that "men who successfully break the cycle of violence are *living intentionally*. They are *becoming aware* of themselves and their environments; they are *resolving* to be different from their fathers, to live positively, and to contribute to the world; and they are *acting on* their decisions by separating from their past, making new connections, implementing their plans, and contributing to others." (Balshaw, 1993, p. iii)

The participants in our ABE study were *living intentionally* as Balshaw describes it, through the process of becoming aware that they wanted to change their lives, resolving to re-enter a formal educational experience, and acting in ways that lived out that decision.

In the present study, the researchers tried to examine the impacts and essence of the ABE experience from the point of view of the participants. We realized that what is needed is a way of seeing and illustrating the systemic, circular and interactive nature of ABE impact—how one thing enables and builds on another. Balshaw's discovery that there did not appear to be a simple linear progression that began with awareness and ended with action seems to be appropriate for the former ABE participants as well.

> As individuals act on their resolutions, their successes seem to alter their perceptions of themselves and their environments. They seem to become increasingly aware of the power they have to make choices, to act on their choices, and to influence their environments. (Balshaw, 1993, p. 65)

Instead, Balshaw suggested an ever-opening-spiral in which the process of living intentionally loops from becoming aware, resolving, and acting, back to an increasing and deeper level of awareness.

> ...each decision can build on the previous one, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the actions, enhancing awareness of self and others, and increasing the likelihood of decisions of broader scope. (p. 65)

This is a process very like that described by many of the instructors in our study. Comments such as the following were typical.

> But what is exciting for me is the awareness that people gain of their own power. And especially around the written work, I feel, because so much of what I do is around writing, empowering people to express themselves in a thoughtful kind of way on paper. Also, I like to watch, because of that writing thing, how they can start to judge and make critical assessments of what is around them, what is coming at them. Especially the media stuff. They start to be more thoughtful, and have a larger sense of having choices, of taking in certain information or not. I really like to see that happen in my class. David

> I guess you could say it has got some obvious things in terms of skills, and more importantly literacy is related to feelings and self image. We talk a lot about empowerment, and personal responsibility and that sort of thing, so perhaps literacy can be equated to some feeling a person has about how much they are in control of their lives.
>
> Wayne

There was a great deal of congruence between many of the processes in the present study and the process suggested by Balshaw's (1993) conceptual framework.

Table A contains the process themes that Balshaw suggested for her core variable of *living intentionally* (Balshaw, 1993, p. 68).

Table A
Process Themes[1]
Core Variable: Living Intentionally

1. Becoming aware:
    - A. Of my environment
        - 1. that what is occurring is violent;
        - 2. that violence has negative consequences;
        - 3. that violence is unacceptable;
        - 4. that there is an alternative.
    - B. Of myself
        - 1. Acknowledging and overcoming fear
            - a. of anger and conflict;
            - b. of being like my father.
        - 2. Recognizing my own power
            - a. to choose;
            - b. to behave differently than my parents;
            - c. to influence the behavior of others.
        - 3. Defining myself in positive terms
            - a. by discovering I am not my father;
            - b. by keeping things in perspective;
            - c. by discovering and celebrating my gifts, by recognizing my potential;
            - d. by learning to dream, by discovering my mission.

II. Resolving: Taking Responsibility, Deciding, Committing
- A. to be different from my father (i.e., "I will not be violent");
- B. to live a positive life;
- C. to contribute to the health of the whole.

III. Acting
- A. Separating from the past
    - 1. by moving away from home;
    - 2. by restricting contact with negative influences;
    - 3. by resolving my own anger;
    - 4. by forgiving or reconciling;
    - 5. by remembering or forgetting, by working through and letting go.
- B. Connecting with others
    - 1. by seeing myself as part of the whole;
    - 2. by experiencing empathy for others;
    - 3. by overcoming isolation;
    - 4. by receiving from mentors;
    - 5. by developing positive relationships, by choosing a marriage partner.
- C. Implementing my resolutions
    - 1. by taking risks;
    - 2. by taking responsibility for my own behavior, by acting with intention;
    - 3. by confronting and changing any negative behaviors;
    - 4. by integrating the masculine and feminine;
    - 5. by being open and flexible, by evaluating and revising.
- D. Contributing to the world
    - 1. by using my gifts in creative ways;
    - 2. by sharing my wisdom, by caring for others, by fostering their growth;
    - 3. by leaving a mark, by completing the circle.

---

[1] from Balshaw, B. (1993) *Living Intentionally: A Study of Nonviolent Men who Witnessed Spousal Abuse in Childhood*, Table 4.2, p. 68. Used with permission.

Table B

ABE Experiences in Relation to the Living Intentionally Process[1]

1. ***Becoming aware:***

   a. *of my environment*
      - I want my circumstances to be different.

   b. *of myself*
      - *acknowledging and overcoming fear of failure;*
      - *recognizing my own power to learn;*
      - *learning about my own learning style;*
      - *defining myself in positive terms.*

2. ***Resolving:***

   a. *taking responsibility to live a more positive life;*

   b. making a commitment to the learning process.

3. ***Acting:***

   a. *separating from the past*
      - *restricting contact with negative influences*
      - *working through feelings.*

   b. *connecting with others*
      - *overcoming isolation;*
      - *receiving from mentors/*instructors;
      - giving to and receiving from peers.

   c. *implementing my resolutions*
      - *taking risks;*
      - learning from my mistakes and trying again;
      - setting goals for myself and achieving them.

   d. *contributing to the world*
      - recognizing, valuing, and using my own gifts;
      - *sharing my wisdom, caring for others,* volunteering my time and *fostering others' growth;*
      - getting involved in the community.

4. **Becoming aware at a deeper and broader level because of what I have learned in the first cycle of the process.**

---

[1] Adapted from Balshaw, B. (1993) *Living Intentionally: A Study of Nonviolent Men Who Witnessed Spousal Abuse in Childhood*, Table 4.2, p.68. Used with permission.

The very same themes were important in the experiences that ABE participants reported in this study. Table B contains a summary of those ABE experiences in relation to the *living intentionally* process, and to Balshaw's terms which appear in italics. As researchers we were struck by how similar the processes and activities were in the stories of students who had experienced positive ABE impacts, compared to the processes and activities that appeared to enable high-risk individuals to break the cycle of violence. This leaves lots of room for speculation. Some of these people may have shared highly similar backgrounds and circumstances, since several students spoke of childhood abuse and family violence. The question can be asked was it the ABE experience that made the difference for people, or is it intentional people who can seek out and use ABE resources and are diligent in reaching their goals? Both? This question is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present study.

In the present study, it was generally the case that the more radical the changes the ABE students had made in their lives, the more these elements had been part of the process. Phyllis' story found in Appendix F, for example, contains many of these themes, but at least one or two of them have been present in every former student's history.

Awareness Of The Environment And Themselves

A review of the comments by our participants (Chapter II) reveals how the ABE experience has helped them become more aware of their environment, of what was occurring in the world around them, and certainly more aware of themselves. Many people told of having to acknowledge and overcome their fear of failure, and of further rejection by authority figures and peers. As they lived out their decision to return to school, they began to experience success and to recognize their own power to learn, to think and to assist others. A key element in realizing the essence of the ABE experience was to define themselves in positive terms. People began to discover and celebrate their unique talents, and to formulate personal goals and dreams.

In the application of Balshaw's (1993) model to our findings, it is important to add the factor we call "myths". By this is meant stories we hear that mediate our understanding and behavior in the world. Thus, defining the self in positive terms can be a re-structuring of the personal myths that we have taken on and/or built for ourselves, whose roots often began in childhood and in our early school experiences. One such example is our negative self-talk (e.g., "I am dumb"). Educational institutions are one of the major mechanisms used by any society to socialize its members into an understanding and acceptance of myths, i.e., important parts of its culture. For example, two of the modern myths which have been cherished by liberal democratic society are:

> "A good education will get you a good job."
> "If you work hard you will succeed."

These two statements are oriented toward personal and individual control over success.

Difficulties arise when the personal control myths are used as logical imperatives and turned on people—"If you are not successful, it must be because you have not worked hard enough." A critique of the social structures that help shape and invisibly determine our circumstances for success is needed here. Otherwise, it is far too easy to focus on personal characteristics as the answer for the undesirable situation and "blame the victim." A recent National Council of Welfare report quoted in a British Columbia newspaper had this to say:

> In reality, poverty is often the result of bad luck: a person loses a job, a second wage-earner in a family leaves or dies, or a person is kept out of the labor force by a severe illness or disability… Still the myth persists poverty is primarily due to laziness or incompetence.
>
> *Vancouver Sun*, December 17, 1993

It seems that the same myths apply to those whose early school and life experiences left them with difficulties in reading, writing and math. The stories of former ABE students captured vividly how they had had to overcome and change their personal myths and negative self-talk, which had for years been reinforced by a societal atmosphere of blame. According to U.S. psychologist Michael Lerner, a person who has had a lifetime of abusive, oppressive situations and little real power often "assumes personal responsibility for her own powerlessness [and] creates additional powerlessness, a surplus of self-blame preventing her from acting to change her immediate conditions." (Labonte, 1989, p. 28)

Resolving To Live More Positive Lives

In the present study, there was ample evidence in the participants' stories that they had resolved to take responsibility to be at class on time, do their assignments and stick with the process even when facing many kinds of pressures and barriers. People did resolve to live more positive and healthy lives, and put their resolve into action by separating from the past. This included leaving negative influences such as irresponsible friends and unsupportive or abusive spouses; and dealing with old feelings of grief and anger. They also confronted and changed negative behavior such as substance abuse or poor parenting. They generally took a constructive attitude toward themselves and tried to learn from their mistakes. The participants in this study also spoke of connecting with others, making new friends and receiving from mentors.

Connecting With Others

Although this study saw the transformational process of many ABE experiences as essentially an internal journey, the shaping of the day-to-day ABE context was a social one. The process of ABE is fundamentally social, even for those students working on specific curricula by themselves.

The role of the instructor as the *mentor* and *mediator* in this process is crucial, at both a practical and theoretical level. The instructor is needed not only to clarify points, impart information and answer questions, but also to act as trusted counsellor, coach and guide. The instructor is someone who has been where the student wants to go, and who will support the student in his or her journey. The mentor helps develop critical understanding, awareness of choices and responsibility for actions, all within a supportive, non-judgmental environment. A mentor/instructor can also play the vital role of the person who was missed in the student's early life. This is the person who models and mirrors a positive image of the student to the student, and thereby assists the development of that individual's fledgling self-esteem. Former students spoke movingly of the impact of being themselves without fear for the first time in their lives—"I can be me." In a recent discussion of the need for mentors, a well-known American poet (Robert Bly, 1989) suggested that "we can only really learn from someone who cares about our soul" (i.e., our total well-being). Various quotes from participants in the present study have revealed the central role the mentor/instructor has in the development of a student's sense of self-efficacy. Comments from former students in our study revealed the enormous importance of having instructors who were such mentors, counsellors and friends. They were also critical of instructors who did not properly support and guide them.

Contributing To the World

Certainly there was ample evidence in the present study of ways in which participants were contributing positively to the world. They were recognizing, valuing, and using their talents, sharing their wisdom and caring for others. From a comparison of the elements of the stories behind most ABE experiences and the elements of Balshaw's model, it seems that the process of *living intentionally* may have formed the context within which *learning to learn* could take place.

C. Implications For Planning and Delivering ABE/Literacy Resources

Learning to learn involves highly interactive, cyclical and organic activities. Everything affects and is affected by everything else. The ABE participants' stories and the instructors' comments reflect this holistic view. Implicit within our findings is the assumption that people can and do make changes in their lives on the strength of their own desire and commitment to a better situation for themselves and their loved ones. This study has illustrated that the ABE experience can contribute positively to the evolution of responsible adults getting on with their lives.

This has led us the following conclusion and hypothesis:

To the degree that any ABE program nurtures and enables the *learning to learn* model and the *living intentionally* process, enduring positive impacts as described in this study will result.

This means that the system of planning and delivering ABE should facilitate students' becoming aware of their environment, themselves, and their real learning needs. The ABE system should support students' taking responsibility for living more fulfilling lives while making a commitment to the learning process that is relevant to them. The researchers believe there are five major implications to be drawn from viewing the results through our *learning to learn* model and the *intentional living* process (Balshaw, 1993). They are

1. rethinking the drop-out label;
2. systemic support for life-long learning;
3. the importance of connecting with others;
4. the need to contribute to the world; and,
5. the role of adult education in the economy and society.

This report concludes with a discussion of each implication.

1. Rethinking The Drop-out Label

The high rate of drop-out from ABE programs has long been noted but only recently investigated (Thomas, 1990; Quigley, 1990).

What might appear as "drop-out," "resistance," "unmotivated" or "irresponsible behavior," is, *from the point of view of the ABE student who is engaged in "living intentionally,"* a rational and considered life choice based on the person's needs and current situation (e.g., health issues, family problems, financial barriers, other life opportunities, and so on). Both Thomas (1990) and Malicky and Norman (1993) discussed students who left because their needs (e.g., learning disability) were not being met. Many people put upgrading on hold when a job comes up, or when childcare requirements present conflict with school. Thomas (1990) used "stop-outs" to describe people whom circumstances had forced out of class but who later decided to return. In fact, she found that 21 out of 24 withdrawals had returned or had the intention to return to ABE (p. 67) *in spite of all kinds of barriers*. This prompted a comment with which we absolutely agree:

> These withdrawals have to be admired for their resilience and their continuing attempts to follow and believe in their dreams. The fact that so many return to ABE or intend to return shows that ABE does have an attraction for those who know about it and have tried it. (p. 71)

Our study also showed that people do keep coming back. Half of our sample had multiple program backgrounds. Similarly, the majority (67%) of the participants studied by Malicky and Norman (1993) reported that they had been in another literacy program. These results could indicate a highly mobile population. They could also signify thoughtful, competent adults picking and choosing what is best for them in their lives at that time.

2. Systemic Support For Life-long Learning

Our shifting economic paradigm will mean ever-increasing sophistication and change in the workplace and the environment around us. We will all need constant upgrading/training opportunities to handle and integrate the information explosion, new technology, and so on. The recent Report on the Future Development of Adult/Continuing Education in British Columbia (Faris, 1992) makes the point "throughout the world there has been growing acceptance of the concept of lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social goal" (p. 14). Society can no longer afford to sustain the traditional view/myth that ABE is a "second chance" at the brass ring for those who somehow "failed" the system years ago.

If we are to take an approach which facilitates intentional living in the ABE context, we will have potential students formulating the needs and articulating the options that make lifelong learning possible for them, without the crippling stigma that people in our study told us they felt the first day of class. This will require systemic and attitudinal adjustments so that "dropping in" for a taste of continuing education throughout one's life is an easy, less traumatic and fluid process.

With regard to the way in which ABE resources are provided, a number of authors (Fingaret, 1984; Wishart, 1993; Thomas, 1990; Faris, 1992; Labonte, 1989; Darville, 1989), have suggested that innovative community-based strategies, building on the needs and strengths of the members of the community, are particularly well suited to the lifelong learning process.

Support for lifelong learning also has systemic implications in relation to:

a. access to ABE;
b. assessment of students;
c. support during the program; and
d. continuing contact after leaving.

a. Access To ABE

The system that advertises for, locates and places students should be set up so that it is as easy as possible (i.e., non-bureaucratic) to find, make friendly contact with, and enter and re-enter ABE programs over time. For example, this may mean changes in the way records are kept and processed, so that people can come and go and be known to the system as the same person at different places and times, rather than separate students.

b. Assessment Of Students

The system that assesses students should routinely include not only entry skill levels, but a broader and deeper interview process to determine the type of support required to enable the student to proceed smoothly through the stages of *learning to learn*. The assessment process should also include information about the total range of programs and opportunities within a certain geographic area. This can promote student choice and a matching of learning needs and learning styles (e.g., group vs. individual approaches). At present, people are often considered only in terms of that part of the system with which they make contact rather than the whole array of programs that might be available in the various communities. This means instructors need more information about and familiarity with the ABE programs in the area.

c. Support During The Program

Support during the students' enrollment in ABE programs to sustain lifelong learning would include financial assistance and practical assistance such as child care services. Concrete help in separating from the past and working through feelings should include access to professional assistance when necessary.

d. Continuing Contact After Leaving

Contact by the program after students have left ABE might also facilitate continued "dropping in". It seems that there would be benefits for both students and instructors in the system from a more systematic approach to follow-up. Instructors stressed that they only hear from students who take the initiative to keep in touch. Regular contact with former students of some kind by the ABE system would encourage re-entry and lifelong learning.

3. Connecting With Others

The importance of connecting with others was stressed in the comments of the ABE paricipants and in the *learning to learn* model. It appears to be a significant factor.

a. Role Of Peers

Some former students said they preferred self-paced or computer-assisted learning situations over groups. Some of these people sought out opportunities for connecting with their peers by offering to tutor them. It is suggested that ABE programs consciously include opportunities for students to relate to one another, particularly in less formal learning environments.

b. Role Of The Instructor

The role of the instructor as mentor and catalyst for the process of changing one's personal myth and behavior is pivotal. This places a great deal of responsibility on the instructor even in self-paced or computer-assisted learning situations.

There are implications for the selection, training and on-going support of the unique individuals who take on the instructor's mantle. They need to have a solid understanding of their own personal and societal myths, and a self-critical eye on the job they are doing to assist someone else on that person's journey, not replaying their own.

The instructors in our study were particularly clear on this point:

> I mean, it's wonderful to talk to students about how after ABE they can go to nursing for two years. And of course nursing means maybe 100 miles away, and they have a family, child care. So who's going to support that? Or the move, or some other part, reality you know? And because the student is possibly very vulnerable, because they are really there for questions and they want things filling up and changing their life, they buy in, and the reality might be that that doesn't happen. And does that come from them, or did that – did they come and say "I want to be a nurse and do this for me," or did some instructor say, "You know, I always wanted to do that when I was a kid," and in this very caring way you've orchestrated something to happen that wasn't in the reality realm for that student?"
>
> Marg

Because of the psychological needs of the participants in the ABE experience, it is necessary to prepare instructors with certain social work/counselling skills beyond those typically available in an adult education curriculum. This is a fine line and an area of discomfort for some, but not all instructors in this study. Instructors are typically "people" people, whom the system should value and promote for their willingness to be mentors to adult students. However, as the following instructor indicated, support for instructors should include professional social work/psychology back-up and community referral as needed:

> I had two or three years ago a woman who began for the first time to express horrible details about her life and the past, and the irony was this woman was an incredible writer, she was and had no confidence, had a horrible life and saw herself in incredibly negative terms, but was a beautiful, beautiful writer, almost good enough to be published today, she was so good, but when she started she couldn't stop. She went and she wouldn't see anybody, and I did eight referrals for her and took her to the appointments – she only liked doing it this way, and she only liked working with me. She went on the spiral, she attempted suicide, she lost some of her children to Social Services, and I have a responsibility in that area to not let some of that happen if I can, or to try to intervene before it gets so intense that a student can't cope with it any longer. It's a line I find really hard to draw; to want to be supportive, to want to be interested, to want to because sometimes you just need to say some things and they don't need long-term support, they just need acknowledgment. This was their pain; this was their problem and they dealt with it, or they just got on with their lives. Sometimes you just need that; other times you need a great deal more work than that, and as an instructor, I'm not the one to provide that. Bob

4. Contributing To The World

One of the factors that seemed to lead to lasting impact for students was having structured access to volunteering and involvement with the community. This feature seemed to meet the needs of both students and instructors who were involved. For students whose unmet potential had been dammed up inside for years, this opportunity met a need to give and feel useful. For instructors, it was a unique and successful method of having students learn to apply their skills to real world situations.

The value of caring for others, using one's gifts and contributing to the world has been found to be a part of ABE participants *learning to learn* and is inherent in the *living intentionally* process. ABE programs that formally include these opportunities or encourage them will be increasing the probability of positive long-term impacts for their students.

5. The Role Of Adult Basic Education In The Economy and Society

There has been contradictory evidence in the literature whether upgrading through ABE leads to employment. However, there is clear evidence that engaging in the process that this study has called *learning to learn* results in healthier lifestyles. It is in this sense that the economic benefits to society of ABE programs can be quite significant. It seems to us that the positive impacts of ABE are cost-effective. We would like to develop the idea of economic impact (not necessarily employment) a bit further.

First, for those former students who do get jobs, there is the direct productive contribution to the economy and the taxes paid. These same people also represent less direct cost to society in terms of no longer needing income security payments.

Second, for all those who engage in *learning to learn*, whether or not they get jobs, there is less cost to society indirectly. This is because the ABE process of *learning to learn* facilitates healthy personal and family lifestyles, thus creating a healthier society with an increase in general well-being.

Job or not, former students have told us that they feel better about themselves, are making healthier choices about their life-styles (e.g., stop drinking, stop criminal behavior, and so on), are passing on this benefit to their children (as better parents), and are contributing to their communities (as better and more informed citizens). In addition, there is a benefit to society in terms of the time donated in volunteerism. That time does not show up on the balance sheet. All of these factors lead us to believe that ABE does have an economic impact.

There is a role for adult basic education as society grapples with higher and higher health costs and turns to *health promotion as a social and an economic strategy*. There can be a link between adult basic education and increasing holistic health for the general low-literate population. This would be in the promotion of "well-ness." Specifically, we have heard stories in this study that convince us that ABE can assist people in not being hapless, helpless and hopeless. The cycle of despondency and dependency is often broken.

We have heard people speak of going from negative self-talk to a sense of self-efficacy, autonomy and having the power to change their lives. One of the greatest positive impacts and contributions of the ABE experience for people served well (and even to some extent in those not as well served) was to instill in them a sense of future. They see that they accomplished something, can do so again in the future, and can make plans and set goals. The ABE experience has in many ways expanded former students' sense of personal possibilities, i.e., what they can learn, that they can access further training and further education. It was through the opportunities offered by ABE that some people discovered what they are interested in, e.g., finding out by volunteering that they are interested in special needs children, or in long term care.

"Health exists in the dynamic moments of our social relationships" (Labonte, 1989, p. 24). Literacy/ABE experiences are health-promoting activities in the truest sense. The processes of gaining greater access to their physical, social and inner worlds, *learning to learn*, and building self-confidence, all lead to reaching out and greater participation in social relationships of all kinds. Literacy is a developmental concept where individual, family and community growth and potential are enhanced. The positive process of *learning to learn* is also a classic definition of empowerment (Rappaport, 1984), and a condition for optimum well-being.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Introduction

John Ryan, of UNESCO speaking at the Literacy 2000 conference, made the following comment about the impact of literacy education.

> Your clients, I am certain, appreciate a well-conducted programme, but what counts most is not what happens in the classroom or tutoring centre, but what comes after and as a result of it in their lives. Does literacy make their lives fuller and more meaningful?

Programme planners, instructors, tutors and learners have lots of ideas about the impact gaining or increasing literacy skills should or will have. But it seems that researchers in British Columbia have not yet asked former literacy students about such matters. Thus the Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia has commissioned a study of former Literacy and/or Adult Basic Education (ABE) students to determine answers to the question:

> What have been the impacts of literacy education on the lives of former Literacy and/or Adult Basic Education students?

While former students are the focus of the research question, it is useful to note that literacy training involves a specific contextual contact between two participants, the learner and the instructor or tutor. To enrich the understanding of the learner's experience, it is also of interest to determine the expected impacts of Literacy and/or ABE programmes from the instructor's perspective. Thus this study will attempt to determine the participatory experience of both learners and instructors and to describe the long-term effects of the experiences on the learners both in reality and as conceived by instructors.

For purposes of this study, a former student is defined as a person who has attended a Literacy or ABE programme within the last ten years for a minimum of three consecutive months and who has been away from that programme for at least a year.

As there is little previous related research to build upon, the study will be exploratory, perhaps raising more questions then providing definitive answers. Nevertheless, the study is expected to generate valuable information on the long-term influence literacy education has on students. It is anticipated the research results will be useful to policy makers, programme and curriculum planners, and literacy advocacy groups. Above all, the research should benefit literacy students and instructors.

Specific Purpose

1. To describe the effects that participation in a Literacy and/or ABE programme has had on the lives of former learners from their perspective; and

2. To describe the intended effects of participation in a Literacy and/or ABE programme on the lives of learners from instructors' perspectives; and

3. To discover what observations and conclusions may be drawn from such research.

Appendix A — Terms of Reference

Intended Outcomes

The study is designed to provide information on the long-term influence literacy education has had on students. This information will be presented in a (Preliminary and) Final Report that is primarily intended to provide descriptive information to literacy workers and students. To the extent that conclusions may be drawn, the study is intended to inform programme policy, curriculum development and program delivery. The study is exploratory and may be considered basic research. It is not intended to be either a summative or formative evaluation designed to determine the effectiveness of particular interventions and programmes. The results are expected to be meaningful at the macro level.

Methodology

The basic approach to the study will be phenomenological. The research will be non-manipulative, unobtrusive and non-controlling with an openness to whatever emerges through in-depth interviews. The approach will discover real-life situations as they naturally unfold in the interview process. A qualitative and naturalistic approach will allow the researchers to inductively and holistically understand the former students' life experiences in relation to the context-specific setting of the former Literacy and/or ABE programmes. The design strategy is to enable the significant analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be. The validity of each person's experience will be recognized.

In each case the personal history of the former student will be reviewed reflecting three life phases in relation to participation in a Literacy and/or ABE programme.

1. Pre-Literacy/ABE experience, that is, life experiences that led to participation.
2. Literacy/ABE programme experience, that is, experiences of and during participation.
3. Post-Literacy/ABE experience, that is, life experiences since participation.

As noted above, former literacy learners are defined as those who have attended a Literacy and/or ABE programme within the last ten years for a minimum of three consecutive months and who have been away from the programme for at least one year. The researchers will conduct in-depth interviews with 36 to 60 such former literacy learners. Each interview is expected to take from 1 to 3 hours. With the interviewee's permission, each interview will be audio taped. The interviewees will be chosen from: (i) lists provided by literacy instructors, (ii) responses to radio, television, newspaper and poster advertisements and (iii) contacts made through social and community agencies.

The Former Student interviewees selection process will attempt to include interviewees from a variety of age groups, cultural backgrounds and literacy program experiences.

A minimum of 4 literacy instructors from each area will also be interviewed for a minimum total of 12. An attempt will be made to interview at least 12 additional instructors from around the province at the ABEABC conference.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> "Stories move in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles. There are stories inside stories and stories between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. And when you're lost, you start to look around and to listen."
>
> Corey Fischer, Albert Greenberg, and Naomi Newman
> of A Traveling Jewish Theatre, Coming From a Great Distance,
> cited in Metzger, 1992, p. 49

This exploratory research examined the long term impacts of participation in Adult Basic Education and Literacy programs on the lives of the people who participated in them at least a year ago. The main source of information was stories told by former students during private face-to-face interviews. The study emphasizes the patterns and similarities in the stories people told describing their experiences and their perceptions.

The research approach investigated personal experiences of a selected group of people. This qualitative approach to research required each researcher to listen to the tapes, make notes, read and re-read the typed versions of the interviews, and pull out phrases that seemed to cluster into distinct topics. Discussion about the emerging clusters and ideas led to our analysis. Because this study focused on what former ABE/Literacy students had experienced in the past, what they were experiencing in the present, and how they interpreted lasting impacts on their lives, this study reflected a traditional phenomenological perspective.

> "There is one final dimension that differentiates a phenomenological approach: the assumption that *there is an essence or essences to shared experience.* These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example, the essences of loneliness, the essence of being a mother, or the essence of being a participant in a particular program."
>
> Patton, 1990, p.70.

We searched for the essences of the impact of having participated in an ABE/Literacy program. The researchers took an active, interpretive role by interacting with a small, purposeful sample of people who were willing to tell their stories. We combined this with methods for ensuring the quality and credibility of qualitative research.

The Conceptual Framework

We began by reducing potential sources of personal or theoretical bias. Two of the three researchers on the team had no background in Adult Basic Education or Literacy. They brought fresh perspectives from other fields. In order to avoid creating a theoretical bias, the literature review was scant prior to the study. The researchers believed that essences of the impacts of participating in an ABE/Literacy program would surface as former students told their personal stories.

> "Every life is a story. Telling the story and seeing our life as story are part of the creative process. The false story or the formula story diminishes and contracts us. But the real story, painful as it may be, expands us and opens our heart. Every real story is part of the construction of self, and every real story adds its dimension and wisdom to the collective."
>
> Metzger, 1993, p. 49, p. 115.

The researchers also believed that people could and would make distinctions, when asked, between what they were able to do as a consequence of their ABE experience, and what they could already do, or would have done anyway without attending an ABE/Literacy program. The main attribute the researchers brought to the study was curiosity. Would former students feel that ABE had had an impact on their lives, especially after they were no longer participating in an ABE program and the "honeymoon" was over?

Sampling of Study Participants

We selected a small number of information-rich cases for study in depth. We used a sampling system called "maximum variation sampling" (Patton, 1990, p. 172). To form our sample, we tried to have an equal number of participants from each level of ABE (Fundamental, Intermediate and Advanced) and an equal number from the three different geographical areas of British Columbia (a major metropolitan area, an urban area, and a rural area). We succeeded in getting a sample that was diverse in age, ethnic origin, and type of program background (i.e., college based, school district based, community agency based, and other sponsors of ABE programs). As Michael Patton, a well-known qualitative researcher, has said "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program." (1990, p. 172) Our goal was to isolate common patterns within the study group in the hope of revealing a "deeper structure" that might characterize the general experience of the impact of ABE/Literacy programs on the lives of former students.

The criteria for selection of individual participants were that they had been enrolled in an ABE or Literacy program for at least three months, had been away from their last ABE course for at least one year at the time of being interviewed, and were willing to participate in the study. This is a follow-up study.

In order to find people who represented as broad a spectrum of impacts as possible, rather than just "successes" or just "failures," we used several methods of contacting former students in each location. As an incentive, each participant was paid $10.00 per hour for their time. The methods used were: public service announcements offered through local radio and television stations at no charge; posters and flyers advertising the study at local UIC offices and social service agencies, including various community centres and neighborhood houses; and in the rural area, the researcher arranged to be interviewed about the study by local free-lance journalists whose articles appeared in three local newspapers.

As well, the researchers contacted ABE instructors of the different levels in school district, community college and community agency ABE programs. Instructors were asked to look at their lists of students who had been in ABE classes over a year ago, to make contact with four-to-six people and ask if they were interested in participating in the study. One instructor talked specifically about her sample selection approach:

> I went through our past records and pulled up people whose names I remembered as having attended sufficiently long for me to remember their names and who were no longer attending in the past year. And some of them may have gone on to something else at the college and some of them may not be doing anything right now. About 12 to 15 names. A lot of them you may not be able to get in touch with. They move or their number is not in service or whatever. I tried to find some from all different levels, from level 1 right through grade 12.

The names and phone numbers of those students who agreed to be contacted were then passed on by the instructors to the researchers. The individual was contacted and an interview was arranged.

This process resulted in a total of 45 interviews with former ABE students and 15 interviews with instructors currently teaching in an ABE/Literacy program. These numbers do not reveal the tremendous difficulty in locating former ABE students to participate in the study who met the criteria. The ratio of 'dead-ends' to successful contacts for participation in the study was conservatively estimated at 5-to-1.

There was also the problem of people who had agreed to participate but did not show up for the interview. This happened with about 20 percent of the scheduled interviews, particularly in the urban areas. As well, one of the participants was later dropped from the study because he had not been away from an ABE program for over a year. We kept one other student who had been in ABE programs in the past but had been way for more than a year and had recently re-enrolled for a different ABE program. This brought the total of former ABE students interviewed to 44. Seventeen of those interviewed (38%) were from a rural area, fourteen (32%) from an urban area, and thirteen students (30%) were from the metropolitan area of BC.

TABLE 1

Gender By Start Level

	Fundamental	Intermediate	Advanced	Total	%
Male	6	6	5	17	39
Female	8	14	5	27	61
Sub-Total	14	20	10	44	100
%	32	45	23	100	

Table 1 shows the gender of the people interviewed in the study in relation to the level at which they began taking ABE. The sub-totals reveal that the sample was made up of about 20 percent more women than men, and that the three entry levels were not equally represented despite our hope. There were more people who started at the intermediate level, and fewer at the advanced level than intended. The proportion of men to women is almost the same for the fundamental and the advanced level participants in the study; however, there were about twice as many women as men in the intermediate level.

TABLE 2
Gender By Age

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-44	55-69	Over 70	total	%
Male	0	10	4	2	1	0	17	39
Female	1	8	12	3	2	1	27	61
Sub-Total	1	18	16	5	3	1	44	100
%	2.3	41	36	11	7	2.3	99.6	

Table 2 shows the age of the study participants and their gender. Very few young people and very few older people participated. About three quarters of the participants were between 25 and 44 years old. Women outnumbered men in every age category except 25-34.

TABLE 3
Ethnic Background By Start Level

	Fundamental	Intermediate	Advanced	Total	%
Non Aboriginal	10	10	7	27	61
Aboriginal	2	7	3	12	27
New Canadian	2	3	0	5	11
Total	14	20	10	44	99
%	32	45	23	100	

Table 3 shows the ethnic background of people in the study in terms of their ABE start level. Ethnic background was divided into three categories: Aboriginal people, non-Aboriginal people who were born in Canada, and new Canadians who were born outside of Canada. Roughly 30 percent of the people in our study were Aboriginal people, 60 percent were non-Aboriginal people born in Canada, and 10 percent were new Canadians. This table suggests that, in terms of proportion, relatively more Aboriginal people and new Canadians began at the intermediate level than non-Aboriginal people. Proportionally more non-Aboriginal participants started ABE at the fundamental level.

TABLE 4
Ethnic Background By Age

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-44	55-69	Over 70	total	%
Non-Aboriginal	1	10	9	4	2	1	27	61
Aboriginal	0	5	5	1	1	0	12	27
New Canadian	0	3	2	0	0	0	5	11
Total	1	18	16	5	3	1	44	99
%	2.3	41	36	11	7	2.3	99.6	

Table 4 shows ethnic background by age at the time of the study. It can be seen that there were non-Aboriginal Canadians in more of the various age groups. The Aboriginal Canadians clustered more in the middle age groups, while new Canadian students were found only in the 25-44 age range.

TABLE 5
Ethnic Background By Gender

	Male	Female	Total	%
Non Aboriginal	12	15	27	61
Aboriginal	4	8	12	27
New Canadian	1	4	5	11
Total	17	27	44	99
%	37	61	100	

Table 5 contains ethnic background by gender. The ratio of women to men in the study is almost equal for non-Aboriginal people. Twice as many Aboriginal women as men and four times as many women not born in Canada as men became participants. Overall, women outnumbered men in the study by about 3 to 2.

Although we had not intended to generate a random sample which would mirror the basic characteristics of ABE students in BC in general, it is interesting to compare our group with current information about ABE students in BC. Because of the wide variation in the reporting forms and inconsistency of data kept about ABE/Literacy programs in BC, there are some significant gaps in the information available. Unfortunately, there was no information on the number and percentage of ABE students who were registered in the fundamental, intermediate, and advanced levels across the ABE system in BC and none about students involved in community agency sponsored programs. The recent Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour report, ABE Research Project, on adults in college or school district ABE and literacy programs in BC contains some information on gender and age groups.

TABLE 6

Age Groups for January 1992 ABE Students in B.C. (College and School District Programs combined)

Age	%
Less than 19	13.2
19-24	36.0
25-34	30.0
35-44	14.7
45-54	4.7
Older	1.9
%	100.5

ABE Research Report, 1993

Table 6 presents information from The ABE Research Project, describing 42 out of 48 (about 88 percent) of the possible sources of ABE/Literacy programs in BC colleges and school districts. The report information was based on 22,448 ABE students enrolled in January 1992. A comparison of the percentages in Table 6 with the percentages given in Table 2 for various age groups reveals relatively fewer younger people and relatively more older people were in our study than were registered in programs in 1992. For example, 49.2 percent of the January 1992 ABE students for whom the information was known were less than 24 years of age. In our study, this figure was two percent. In the January 1992 group, 14.7 percent fell in the age range 35-44, whereas 36 percent of this study's participants were 35-44 years old.

According to The ABE Research Project, information on the gender of ABE students in BC in January 1992 was known for 80 percent of enrollees. The data showed that "females represent a somewhat higher percentage (55.7%) than do males (44.3%)" (p.8). This was very similar to the figures and the pattern in the present study in which the percentage of females who participated (61%) was higher than the percentage of males (39%).

TABLE 7
Program Types and Registrations

	Program Type	Registrations No.	%
1.	College	36	47
2.	School District	6	8
3.	Community	4	5
4.	Native Learning Centres	6	8
5.	CEC	9	12
6.	Distance Education	5	6
7.	Corrections	1	1
8.	Armed Forces	1	1
9.	Self	9	12
	Total	77	100

Table 7 contains a list of the various types of ABE programs in which our participants had mentioned registering. The number of times the program type was mentioned is given. Participants mentioned nine different program types, including one which the researchers called "self" to describe those instances where people had obtained books and studied on their own. The 44 participants in the study mentioned 77 instances of registering for the variety of programs. Almost half of the registrations were to college programs (47%). The next most often mentioned number of registrations had occurred in Project Based Training or Canadian Job Strategies programs funded by Canada Employment (12%) and the self-taught situations (12%). School district programs were next (8%) and native learning centres (8%).

TABLE 8
Registrations by Participants

Times Registered in an ABE Program	Study Participants No.	%
One	20	45
Two	17	39
Three	5	11
Four	2	5
Total	44	100

Table 8 shows the 77 registrations in terms of the number of times each participant had enrolled in a program. Close to half (45%) of the study participants had been registered in only one ABE program prior to the study. Another group (39%) had registered in two programs. There were also those who had been in three programs (11%) and four programs (5%).

For the purposes of the present study, what is important to note from Tables 1 to 8 is that the sampling approach seems to have achieved the intended "maximum variation" - the group of study participants did reflect diversity in age, ethnic origin, gender and entry level. We had a "mixed bag," if not a random sample.

TABLE 9

Employment Status by ABE Finish/Current Level (read across)

Finish level	part/full		student		unemployed		volunteer		other		total
	#	(%)	#	(%)	#	(%)	#	(%)	#	(%)	
Fundamental	0	(0)	1	(25)	3	(75)	0	(0)	0	(0)	4
Intermediate	3	(23)	2	(15)	5	(38)	1	(9)	2	(15)	13
Advanced	1	(11)	3	(33)	1	(11)	3	(33)	1	(11)	9
Beyond Advanced	6	(33)	9	(50)	2	(11)	1	(6)	0	(0)	18
Total	10		15		11		5		3		44
%	(23)		(34)		(25)		(11)		(7)		(100)

Table 9 shows each student's employment status at the time we interviewed them in terms of their ABE finish level. About one-quarter of people had full or part-time jobs and one-third were still students. One-quarter of all participants were unemployed, but the proportion of people unemployed was higher for those who finished at the fundamental level compared to those who finished at the intermediate level.

Limitations of the Study Sample

One obvious question that can be raised has to do with the success-prone characteristics of those people who make up the sample. One of the instructors interviewed expressed her concern with this issue:

> "I don't know how you are going to control the situation. For a real literacy student to sit down and talk to someone they don't know, for two hours, may seem life-threatening. The student that you will probably get contact with are the ones who have done their program and gone about their business."

It may be that this study has reflected the experiences of people who are less transient former students. It is also true that the stories we heard were from people who could be reached and who were motivated to tell their story. When participants were asked what motivated them to be in the study, most of them felt that ABE had been good for them, and they wanted other people to know about it and benefit from it. Students spoke often about the patience and support offered by their instructors and tutors. Some may have participated in the study to express their gratitude.

However, our sample also contained a few people who felt they had not been very well served by their ABE experience. In our approach, we were more interested in the quality than in the quantity of impacts. If an impact was mentioned by any former student, it was important. Each perceived impact was recorded to preserve the depth and integrity of the person's experience. The detailed descriptions of negative experiences provided useful insights into how the ABE system has operated and what may be contributing factors in both satisfying and unsatisfying situations.

Instrumentation

To guide us in designing our interviews, we used several sources of information and expertise. First, we had the years of experience among the three of us in interviewing and carrying out research in our respective fields.

Secondly, assuming that the impact of ABE would be related to students' initial reasons for going back to school, we were guided by the eight possible goals of reading and writing used in the Native Literacy Research survey (p. 98), and by the motivational profiles of ABE students outlined by Beder and Valentine (1990). These sources discussed content areas that we realized we would want to cover. Because we were interested in the impact of ABE within the context of each person's life story, we decided to ask our basic question in three categories: life before ABE, life during ABE, and life since ABE.

Thirdly, we interviewed a number of ABE instructors at the annual ABE Conference in Fairmont Hot Springs (Spring 1993) before beginning data collection with students. The purposes of these sessions were to obtain information about the intended short and long term impacts of ABE instruction from the instructors' point of view; to hear stories about students who were considered successes and those who were not; to hear instructors' definitions of literacy, and to ask instructors what questions relating to the impact of ABE they would like to have asked.

Table 10
Interview Question Guidelines for Instructors

1. How did you become involved in ABE instruction?
   - *what do you like most about being an instructor?*
   - *least?*

2. What is your definition of "literacy?"

3. In your perception, have there been any changes in the philosophy or expectations of the ABE field over time?
   - *describe*
   - *have these changes affected you?*

4. What do you perceive the short-term impact of ABE is meant to be on students?
   - *important factors for a positive impact?*
   - *do you see a difference between what is intended and what actually happens?*
   - *what would you look for that tells you that what is supposed to happen is taking place?*

5. Can you give me examples of students you have known who were successes?

   Of students who did not succeed?

6. What do you perceive the long-term impact of ABE is meant to be on students?
   - *important factors for a positive impact?*
   - *do you see a difference between what is intended and what actually happens?*
   - *what would you look for that tells you that what is supposed to happen is taking place?*

7. Do you see different results for men *vs.* women? Why?
   - *age groups?*
   - *cultural groups?*
   - *other factors you think are related to success?*

8. What question relating to the impact of ABE would you like to see asked?

9. Any questions of me?

Table 10 contains the questions used in the instructor interviews. The results of the initial five instructor interviews held at the Fairmont Hotsprings Conference helped to prepare for the first group of student interviews, which occurred in the metropolitan area in May 1993.

In an attempt to provide a common context for the interview for both the former students and the researchers, we used a standardized preamble and introduction to the interview. It covered who the researchers were, who had initiated the study and why. People were assured of the confidentiality of the interview, that they were free to stop at any time for a break, and asked to sign a consent form indicating that the researchers could use their material anonymously in the report. See Appendix E for the complete text.

In the important opening few minutes prior to the interview, the researcher thanked the person for coming, chatted with each person, and exchanged some personal information as a way of establishing rapport. We made it clear that we were interested in them and their story about their lives before ABE, during ABE and after. Table 11 contains the list of main questions and related probes that each researcher used to guide the interviews with former students.

Table 11

Interview Question Guidelines for Former Students

(questions in italics are probes to use if necessary)

1. Maybe we could start with your telling me a bit about your background and what early school was like for you.
   - *was education important to your family?*
   - *how far did you go in school?*

2. What made you decide to come to ABE?
   - *what did you want out of it?*

3. Once you were there in ABE, what was the day-to-day experience of school and class like for you?
   - *best thing?*
   - *worst thing?*
   - *fears?*
   - *what would have made it better?*

4. Did you get what you wanted out of ABE?

5. As you look at your life now, do you think being in ABE has made any difference in your life? e.g.,
   - *are there things you know how to do now that you didn't know before ABE? (read signs, do math, etc.)*
   - *what difference does that make for you in your life today?*
   - *were there people you met who affected you?*
   - *are there things you have learned now that you didn't know before?*
   - *were there opportunities that came to you through ABE that made a difference to you?*
   - *things you have learned about yourself? Other people?*
   - *material things you have now that you didn't have before? More money? Job?*
   - *anything you feel now that you didn't feel before ABE?*

6. What is the most important thing that has happened to you as a result of your ABE experience? Why is it important?

7. Do you feel that you have lost anything as a result of your ABE experience?

8. What would you like to see for yourself in the future?
   - *in terms of job? Other areas of life that are important to you?*
   - *will what you did in ABE help you to get what you want?*

9. What led you to take part in our study?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

11. Do you have any questions of me?

Thank you very much for your time and for being willing to tell your story.

The list of questions was used as a backdrop against which the natural flow of the conversation was checked in order to cover all of the areas of interest. For example, people may have a great deal to say in one area of impact (e.g., feelings of self-confidence) and not much in others (e.g., community or political involvement). If an individual had not spontaneously mentioned an area of interest the researcher would ask a question directed to the area. Honoring the flow of a person's own story, and following his or her natural organization of the information, led to a comfortable and rich exploration of the ABE/Literacy experience with the former students. This method had benefits but also created difficulties during data analysis. This was where "listening in circles" became necessary.

Data Collection and Analysis

The careful design of data collection methods, including checks on reliability and validity, result in quality and trustworthiness of the results of any study. This study relied upon three common techniques for enhancing the quality of data collection and analysis:

1. checking the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods (known as methods triangulation). We checked the consistency of findings generated through former students' interviews with results available from the literature. This information is offered throughout the report where appropriate, and in the conclusion section.

2. checking the consistency of findings generated by different data sources within the same method, (known as data sources triangulation). This study was designed to check the consistency of findings generated by student interviews with that obtained through instructor interviews.

3. using multiple analysts to obtain and review findings. The use of three interviewers reduced the potential of bias. Each of the researchers was involved in collecting information from both students and instructors. At each site there were different pairs of researchers, each doing half of the interviews. This allowed the on-site team to confer and problem solve any issues that arose. Each interview was audio taped. During each data collection period, researchers listened to their own and the other person's tapes, making notes of impressions, comments, and hunches. A common scene during data collection was the scribbling down on napkins of important ideas that evolved over lunch or dinner conversations with each other. Each of us independently analyzed the same qualitative data set and then compared our findings as a team.

We were concerned with the reliability and validity of the results. In qualitative, exploratory research such as this, we are not directly concerned with the question of cause and effect. The internal validity we examined was: What is this phenomenon called impact of ABE programs as described and experienced by former students? Can we find some common patterns and themes that fundamentally characterize impact and help us to deeply understand what impact may mean in adult students' lives? In exactly what areas of their lives does impact manifest itself?

The qualitative approach of analyzing interview tapes assumed that there would be an essence of shared experience which would be visible and would lend itself to categorization through the active involvement of the people who were both researchers and fellow human beings. We looked for the existence of this essence to answer the external validity question:

To what populations, settings and interventions can this effect be generalized? When, or if, we locate essence, we find something about the phenomenon that is fundamentally present in all cases at the level of our basic human experience of it.

In our study, we used multiple analysts to collect and analyze the data. If all three of us heard things and saw things that seemed to be pointing to similar patterns even among people of all ages, backgrounds, and ABE entry levels, we could feel more certain that the patterns were really there. Whether we really saw and heard similar patterns was a major methodological issue which we addressed in several ways.

1. The reliability of covering the same ground during interviews was addressed by using a standardized preamble and written questions as a backdrop to ensure that all areas were covered. Before the second round of interviews were conducted, one of us (Gardner) selected ten of the first round of interviews and listened to them to assess inter-interviewer reliability by noting for each tape which areas had been covered. It was clear that the interviewers kept the question guidelines close at hand and used them to make sure all areas were covered, since they were heard reminding themselves to do so. This procedure resulted in 90 percent coverage of the question areas in all tapes. Direct questions from the guidelines were needed barely half of the time. The rest of the time the former students covered the question areas in the natural course of telling their story. We concluded that an acceptable level of inter-interviewer reliability had been established.

2. The reliability of capturing what was said on tape in written text is typically not an issue in studies where all tapes are professionally transcribed. However, we decided against 100 percent transcription in favour of formal transcription of one quarter of the tapes because our financial resources were limited. We also wanted to hear each others interviews in order to benefit from the original tone, inflection and emphasis to get a feel for what was said. A list of interviews, identified by research number, was compiled at the end of data collection. With the aid of a random number table, a random sample of one quarter (15) of former student and instructor tapes was selected for formal transcription, with one quarter of the remaining tapes (15) randomly assigned to each of the researchers. Four more interviews were later transcribed in full making the total transcriptions 19. As a reliability check on the consistency of what was said in the interview being captured in the researchers' written text, a random sample of 8 of the researcher listening tapes (20%) were chosen for a "second listen" by a second member of the team. The eight pairs of observations were examined for the presence or absence of material relating to the interview questions and for the selection of material thought to be the most visible or important quote that illustrated a certain section of the story. The results of careful examination of the eight pairs of listening notes revealed that the interview questions and areas had been faithfully covered, and the selection of pertinent material was highly consistent.

   It seemed that certain parts of the interviews had "struck" each of us in a similar enough way that we had repeated the same parts. The method used to calculate the degree of reliability was: divide the number of times a certain section of the interview was selected by both researchers by the largest number of sections selected by any one researcher; then multiply by 100. For example, in one interview 49 selections of text were identified by one researcher. Of those 49, 46 were also selected by the other researcher (a match). In other words in three instances, an item detected by one of the researchers was missed by the other. The calculation of reliability then was 46 + 49 x 100 = 94%. This meant a reliability result of 94%. Our results indicate that the material was consistently and faithfully reported and very few of the details on the tapes were missed. The result over the eight pairs of reliability checks done in this study was an average of 82 percent, with a range of 71 percent to 94 percent.

3. The reliability of selecting similar patterns and themes from the written text was also achieved. At the end of the transcription and listening notes phase, each researcher had a four-inch binder of typewritten data from former students and instructors which held the contents of 19 formal direct transcriptions from the tape typed by a research assistant, 11 hand written transcriptions from listening notes which were later typed, and listening notes from 30 interviews (later 29 when one of the former students was dropped from the study). The binders also included the eight pairs of reliability check interviews.

We designed a coding guide for our first global coding of all of the data in our respective binders. We each had the same set of twelve coloured marker pens. Table 11 contains the coding guide with which we colour-coded all of our material.

Table 11

Interview Color Coding Guide

Former Students		
1.	Prior experience	brown
2.	Motivation for coming back to school	dark blue
3.	ABE experience	orange
4.	Impacts	red
5.	Suggestions/recommendations	pink
6.	Future aspirations	dark green
7.	Anomalies	black
8.	Policy issues	yellow
Instructors		
1.	Background	brown
2.	Definition of literacy	purple
3.	Changes in philosophy	light green
4.	Definition of success	aqua
5.	Expected impacts	red
6.	Policy issues	yellow
7.	Suggestions/recommendations	pink
8.	Anomalies	black

For example, in our reading of the text, we circled or bracketed off sections, sometimes phrases, sometimes paragraphs, in orange that related to the former student's day-to-day experience in the ABE program. Sections that related to a person's motivation for coming back to school were marked in dark blue. Anything that sounded like an impact was marked in red. As we colour-coded we also marked with a star those quotes that we thought were particularly noteworthy.

To get to the next level of detail, we used an intuitive 'editing' strategy. During our week's work session in October, we took every third interview we had coded in our binders, and made a list of the kinds of experiences being described there. We then looked for ways of organizing the kinds of experiences. For example, the material describing experience while in ABE seemed to cluster into quotes that completed sentences such as I felt... I found that... I liked..., etc. This was a beginning. As one person was going through his or her list, the other two were checking their own version of that interview and checking the consistency of the material selected and the interpretation of that material. These discussions were audio-taped and notes made of key points, along with typed copies of flip chart material that later formed the basis for our findings and conclusions. Following the October team analysis session, researchers proceeded to compile key quotes from the text according to the initial sub-categories we developed in the global areas of life before ABE, the ABE experience, and life after ABE.

In a teamwork session in December, a similar process was used to arrive at a further analysis of the impacts of the ABE experience. Each person took a third of the interviews and collated all quotes on impact. This amounted to roughly 100 pages of material. Each researcher then went through the material, examining the nature of the impact being described and assigning it a name or category (e.g., more able to talk with people). As the researchers read the material they each made a separate list of the categories and of the quotes from specific students that fell in the categories, until no new categories were generated and the 100 pages had been coded. This produced three separate category lists and quotes in each category.

Then, using flip chart paper and a brainstorming technique, the three researchers compared the lists of impact categories and synthesized the three lists into one large one which had five major categories of impact: psychological, economic, social, community and education. The team then took each major category and looked for relevant sub-categories of impact which could be placed under the main heading.

It was then possible with a common framework and a common list of illustrative quotes to proceed to select the most powerful quotes for the relevant sections of the findings. The criteria that were used to select the most suitable or illustrative quotes were: the emotional impact; quotes showing a variety of points of view or situations; the clarity of the point; and its broader implications. As the process of individual coding and then group consensus progressed, it again became apparent how consistently we chose similar material to illustrate the categories of impact, even though we may have used different words to initially name the issue.

It was during our team analysis sessions that we explored the meaning of the categories together and began to look at the patterns and themes that connect them and illuminate them. At this time we were engaged in both the more mechanical process of isolating categories of impact, both positive and negative, and also the more conceptual exercise of trying to see how it was all pointing to deeper meanings for the former students or the essence of the phenomenon.

Data Display

As indicated earlier, the researchers believed in the importance of describing the impacts of ABE in former students' own words. It was decided that the most authentic way to present the results was not in tables or matrices or graphs, but in a series of key quotes woven together that would illustrate what the participants had experienced during each stage of their individual and collective journey. To emphasize the experience of the whole person in the context of his or her life circumstances, we decided to include a complete case history. This was meant to further capture the personal face of ABE impacts.

Deriving Conclusions

How do we know whether a conclusion in a study is real? Most often, 'real' means that another competent researcher, working on his/her own, at the same sites, in the same way, would come up with similar findings to those in this study. We have designed the study to enhance the quality and trustworthiness of our findings. Ultimately, the report should be reviewed by former ABE/Literacy students, the people whose experience it is about. An excellent source of face validity would be feedback from the participants and former students like them.

APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTION OF INTERVIEWEES

Throughout the study the people we interviewed were known as a letter and a number (such as C03). To make the information they gave us more readable we have given them all new names. The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their confidentiality. We are pleased to introduce them to you.

AGATHA, an Aboriginal Canadian, entered at the intermediate level. She is 26 years old and is dyslexic. She is now re-enrolled as an intermediate student.

ANDERS suffered a brain injury as a child and is now 29 years old. He entered ABE at the fundamental level and progressed to the intermediate level. He is now confident to live independently and does community volunteer work.

ARLENE is a new Canadian who immigrated from Holland as a young child. She is in her 40s and started upgrading her education at the intermediate level. She is currently unemployed and living on social assistance.

BARB is 52 years old. She started her ABE upgrading at the intermediate level. After completing her GED she has volunteered to tutor in an Adult Special Education program.

BECKY an Aboriginal Canadian entered an ABE program at the intermediate level. She is now 32 years old, has completed her GED and is working toward a career as a dental receptionist. She also volunteers as a counselor in an immigrant program.

BERNICE is a new Canadian who immigrated from India many years ago. She is now 26 and has progressed from the fundamental level to participating in a Long Term Care Aide program.

BETTY is 43 and entered an ABE program at the intermediate level eventually completing the advanced level. She owns and manages a small store and is taking a certificate course in hospice work.

CAMERON entered ABE as an advanced student and later graduated from a forestry program. He is 40 years old.

COLLEEN is an Aboriginal Canadian who began at the intermediate level. She is now 37 years old, has completed her GED and is enrolled in a criminal justice program.

CORRINNE is 52 years old. She entered at the fundamental level and progressed to the intermediate level. She is currently employed as a homemaker and housekeeper.

CYNTHIA is 36 years old. She entered ABE at the fundamental level. She is dyslexic. She completed her English 12 and Math 10 and is presently unemployed and studying psychology.

DEBBIE completed her GED after starting ABE at the intermediate level. She is now 24 and taking a Social Services program.

DONNA is 40 years old. She entered as an advanced student and went on to complete a forestry program. She is currently unemployed.

GRANT entered an ABE program as a fundamental student. He has a learning disability and cerebral palsy. He is presently unemployed. He is 31 years old.

HEATHER is 45 years old. She entered as a fundamental student and completed the intermediate level. She is currently unemployed.

HILDA is 39 years old. She started at the intermediate level and then completed her GED. She is presently studying accounting.

JAMES is 40 years old, dyslexic and started ABE at the intermediate level. He manages a manufacturing plant.

JANE started at the fundamental level. She is 25 years old and has completed the intermediate level. She is currently a fulltime mother.

JARRETT is interested in literature. He has written a play and is writing a book. He is a 59 year old Aboriginal Canadian. He entered an ABE program at the fundamental level and progressed to the intermediate level.

JASON entered a program at the fundamental level. He is 34 years old and somewhat learning disabled. He works at odd jobs and receives UIC or Social Assistance when unemployed.

JED is in his mid-40s and entered as an advanced student. He eventually completed a Bachelor of Education degree and is now teaching elementary school.

JONAH started at the fundamental level. He has a learning disability and is 30 years old. He works part-time welding.

JULIA is 55 years old. Her first language is French. She entered as a fundamental student and progressed to the intermediate level. She is currently unemployed.

KEVIN is an Aboriginal Canadian, aged 30. He started as an advanced student. He is now working as a paid tutor.

MADEIRA is 35 and started as an intermediate student. She completed her GED, English 12, Math 11 and Biology. She is currently a fulltime mother.

MANON is a 36-year-old Aboriginal Canadian. She is dyslexic and she entered an ABE program at the advanced level. She completed her GED and English 12, is currently unemployed and taking more courses.

MARTIN entered at the fundamental level. He is 34 years old. He has learning and physical disabilities. He progressed to the intermediate level and is currently unemployed.

MELISSA is a new Canadian and is 30 years old. She immigrated to Canada as a child from India. She started at the intermediate level. Although she has not yet completed her GED, she is now able to manage her own cleaning business and volunteer as an ESL tutor at her children's school.

MILTON is working in the construction industry after completing a construction course. He is 32 years old and started ABE as an intermediate student. He completed the necessary grade 10 subjects to enter the trades program.

NINA is an Aboriginal Canadian who started ABE at the fundamental level. She progressed to the intermediate level and is now working as an artist.

PETER is 36 years old. He started ABE as an intermediate student. He progressed to the advanced level. He is currently unemployed due to a work-related physical disability and is continuing to take more courses.

PHYLLIS is a 28-year-old Aboriginal Canadian. She started ABE as an intermediate student, completed her GED and is now taking a criminology course.

PIERRE is 36 years old. He started at the intermediate level and completed his GED. He is now a volunteer literacy tutor.

RACHEL is 38 years old. She entered the ABE program at the advanced level, completed her grade 12 and now manages a small deli.

RANDY, an Aboriginal Canadian, is 47 years old and starting an auto mechanics course. He started ABE at the intermediate level.

RUTH is 27 years old. She entered the ABE program at the advanced level, completed her GED, and is now attending classes in a Social Services Worker program. She also volunteers in a community women's program.

SAM is an Aboriginal Canadian. He is 30 years old and started at the advanced level. Having completed that, he is now preparing to enter a Social Services Program to become an Alcohol Resources worker.

SANDRA is 70 years old and wants to fulfill her dream of completing her grade 12. She has been ill for the past couple of years and unable to continue to attend a program.

SARAH is 43 years old, Aboriginal Canadian, and started taking ABE at the intermediate level. She completed several grade 12 subjects, is currently unemployed and taking more courses.

SHILONA is 63 years old. She started as an intermediate student and eventually received her grade 12 diploma. She now does community volunteer work and is unemployed because of a health problem.

SITA is a 40-year-old Aboriginal Canadian. She entered an ABE program at the intermediate level, completed her GED and several grade 12 subjects, got a Bachelor of Arts degree and is currently in law school.

TOM started his ABE program at the advanced level. He is 28 years old. He has completed a Business Marketing program and now manages a store in a major Canadian chain.

VERA is a new Canadian who immigrated from Scotland. She is 34 years old, has a learning disability and is currently enrolled in a cooks training program.

WINSTON completed his GED after starting ABE as an intermediate student. He is currently unemployed.

APPENDIX D: DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

Because there are many definitions of literacy, research regarding literacy often begins with a discussion of the definition of literacy.

We chose a broad definition of literacy as the basis for this study. This definition is also the definition used by the Adult Literacy Cost Shared Fund which funded the study. The definition was developed by Statistics Canada when they conducted their 1991 study, *Adult Literacy in Canada*.

> *"the information processing skills necessary to use the printed materials commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community."*

Within the British Columbia context, the Grants for Adult Literacy Program which funded this research, has further clarified their meaning by saying that this "includes reading, writing and numeracy at the Fundamental, Intermediate and Advanced levels."

Fundamental, Intermediate and Advanced are names of levels used in the B.C. college system to organize levels and courses and articulate them between colleges. In the *ABE Research Report* prepared by Rivers and Associates in 1992, the levels are defined as:

Fundamental Level

Designed to provide students with the skills necessary to cope more effectively in personal, work and educational situations. Instruction in coping skills, and in English (reading and writing) and mathematics to approximately the grade 8 level is provided. It is anticipated that students will integrate skills and strategies and use them in their daily lives. The outcome is improved self-confidence, self-reliance and self-evaluation.

Intermediate Level

Provides instruction in English, mathematics science and social studies to approximately the grade 10 equivalent. This level prepares students for admission into selected vocational programs requiring grade 10, and/or prepares students for further study.

Advanced Level

Provides instruction in English, mathematics, science and an elective to approximately the grade 11 equivalent. This level prepares students for admission to selected vocational, technical, career and academic programs, and/or enables students to meet prerequisites for academic programs.

In the B. C. college system there is one further level which we did not include in this study, the Provincial Level. The Provincial Level "provides instruction in English and in electives such as mathematics, sciences, and social studies to the equivalent of grade 12. This level prepares students for admission to selected university, technical, career or vocational programs."

As part of our research we asked instructors to tell us their definitions of literacy. Most instructors use a broad definition which responds to the goals of students as well as the needs of our society. Following are some of the definitions given to us by the instructors we interviewed.

> Literacy—the reading, writing and numeracy skills required to function in ones daily living—in ones work, home and community—not just function, but function successfully. Frieda
>
> Lots of people define literacy as up to grade 12. I think they are right, but for me the real crucial literacy is in the fundamental level. I think that at the other levels you get by in various ways and you don't necessarily feel a failure.
> Frieda
>
> Not knowing something that you want or need to know. I had a degree when I was twenty years old, which in this society [is] fairly literate from that age on anyway. If I want to be an electrician, I have to upgrade my math and my physics just as anybody that we work with would have to upgrade something to do whatever he wants to do, and that is my literacy, that literacy is what I think is one end of the continuum, or near one end of a continuum. I think it is a continuum. I really have a lot of stuff around the word illiterate, in the way that we put it into a negative context. I think that there are few people who can't read or write at all in Canada, and after that it is just levels, and that is what you need. When I see cement masons reading the concrete, knowing what to do next, and how much is fair, and how it's pouring out, and whether it's the right stuff, that's reading way beyond my level of reading in reading something else; therefore I'm illiterate in their work. Linda
>
> What do we provide I guess, or I guess it often gets into what the government funds, and what does the public view as literacy. The definitional issues have come up since the International Year of Literacy. We were taking a word, [which in] most people's vernacular meant very beginning reading and writing skills, and expanding it to a technological society definition. It brings up images of Grade 12, and now it's gotten even more elastic as you described it as literacies of all different kinds. Everyone of us has a possibility of needing to change our literacies at some point in our lives, or gaining new literacies.
> Linda
>
> A person's ability to read the things that impact them on a daily basis and interpret them in an intelligent way, whether it is the newspaper, or the vocabulary of the TV or street signs or application forms for jobs. Numeracy is part of it. For example, news stories often carry graphs with them. If a person can't read and interpret them, they miss the base of the article. David
>
> Some are in the program because they want to be able to help their kids with their homework, self-esteem question. Some are in because they want their high-school equivalency and they've had this nagging sense of deficiency in themselves, again a self-esteem question. Some want job qualification. Some find they can't get even janitor's [job] without a high school equivalency.
> David
>
> Well, as well as teaching say to the GED, we have the perspective that people should be literate, be functional and be able to make sense out of the world throughout their lives and to develop an appreciation for reading and writing

and numeracy and incorporate them into their lives in a continuous learning process into their lives. David

I think I'm probably changing the definition. Early on that sort of traditional, you know up to Grade 8 level. Now we are looking at a much broader definition. I think one of the reasons that's happening is the need in the work force for retraining. I guess publicly people are aware that there are lots of workers out there who have skills at many different levels and are highly skilled in their jobs. You may still have literacy needs in terms of retraining or learning new things that have nothing to do with a limited level of reading, and writing. So, I think it is evolving, becoming a very broad definition.
Giselle

Well, I guess there's two that float around. I guess basically K to 12, that literacy definition and there's the fundamentals of literacy. In our centre, most often in the College, we talk literacy as being K to 8 kind of, but I mean you are aware that there's a larger definition. Personally, my personal view is to think of literacy below the Grade 8 level. I guess people, because of their lack of skill in terms of their communication, written and oral, find themselves lacking power and assertive kinds of thoughts and behaviors that get them where they want to be. It holds them back. Anita

For them to feel comfortable in the world outside the classroom. Whether it be in their level to read, to take a phone message and write it down, to have to fill out a form to apply for another amount of schooling. It's a very, very open-ended definition. Margaret

When is a literacy student not a literacy student? I call somebody who can read at a Grade 8 level and work independently. I don't call them a literacy student. They may need help with their learning. I don't call somebody who is 50, or 35, whose reading was OK and they've got to brush up on their composition and their math skills, I don't call that person a literacy student. I call them a literacy student if their reading level is less than Grade 7. From Grade 7 on a person can be pretty independent and learn from a book to a certain degree. Someone whose comprehension is less than that, the ability to read the directions and let it all sink down, learn from something that has been written for you is much less effective. Margaret

My definition would be the ability to work and live using reading and math skills the way you wanted to. If you wanted to find out what was happening in the world you could pick up newspaper. If you wanted to go to the store, look at the labels, you could handle the money. For different people it is going to be very different goals. I have a couple of students right now reading works in psychology. How to talk to people and listen because they are interested in improving their communication skills. They are interested in psychology too because of what has happened to them. A lot of them are inspecting their previous lives and deciding how they can change it for their children and I think that is very important for society. Both men and women, by any means not just the women. Fathers can be just as involved with realizing the mistakes that they have already committed with their own children, or don't want to do to their own children. Jeannette

My definition of literacy basically includes having students who are able to communicate and function in what they term as their community and what they want out of being educated. Sally

I guess my sense of literacy is also a really individualized thing. My sense of it is that when somebody comes in, that we try to help them develop whatever skills, or get whatever knowledge base they need to do what it is they want to do. It's as broad as that. The number of people that actually complete a grade 12 program are very few. I think you will find that province-wide, too. Since they initiated this provincial level diploma in the ABE system. Bob

I would have a hard time putting a number, or grade level or something to that, especially out here in the rural areas; people function in different circles. What is perfectly adequate for one person is not sufficient for another person and I would have a hard time suggesting everyone should have a certain level and pushing people towards that when they may not need it. So I guess it gets down to something along the lines of being able to function within the world that you are living in. Often they need a little help and guidance in coming to an understanding of what those skills might be, how to acquire them and what's important. Bob

I guess primarily I see it as both the means of communicating with and participating in the larger mainframe society. It's obviously reading, writing, comprehension, communicating, all of those kinds of skills, but it is one of those things in which I see literacy as more as a sum of its parts. It's participation, it's feeling that you can participate in an equal basis with the rest of society. It's being able to formulate and articulate and express ideas, develop points of view, articulate points of view. It's access to a lot of what goes on in society. Susan

Literacy is critical thinking as much as it is anything else, and my fear is when you're working with a lot of skills-based, pre-packaged, sort of confidence-based programming, that you eliminate a lot of that critical thinking level. Like I said, when I think of literacy, I think of it being more than the sum of its parts, more than just being able to spell properly and write correct sentences and answer comprehension-type questions at the end of a reading package. That's what I'm afraid of. The other thing is workplace training, and I know that this is a really complex issue because there is an interest in funders and dealing with the unemployment problem, or the underemployment problem in that way, but it's not necessarily training people to become better educated in the broadest sense of that word. It is to fit into particular job classifications, but for me the really complicating issue is there in the final analysis, most of my students want that. What they want is access to a better lifestyle which they assume comes with a better job, more money to spend, and more freedom to make choices about your personal life. Susan

I guess you could say it has got some obvious things in terms of skills, and more importantly literacy is related to feelings, and selfimage. We talk a lot about empowerment, and personal responsibility, and that sort of thing, so perhaps literacy can be equated to some feeling a person has about how much they are in control of their lives. Wayne

APPENDIX E: RELEASE FORM

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Adult Basic Education Association of B.C. has received funding to conduct a study involving adults who have come back to school to gain literacy or basic academic skills. Our interest is to discover why they made the decision to come back to school as adults, what the experience was like, and what impact it has had on their lives since they have left the program.

Interviews will last from 1 to 3 hours. Interviewers will solicit each person's story during an in-depth conversation. All content will be kept confidential. An honorarium of $10.00 per hour (up to $30.00) will be paid to each interviewee. We will be conducting interviews in Vancouver, Prince George and the West Kootenay area around Castlegar, Nelson and Nakusp.

We hope that the results of the research will be ready for distribution by the fall of 1993. The results are expected to be useful in planning program policy, curriculum development, and program delivery models.

Patty Bossort

Consultant
Adult Basic Education and Literacy

4280 Windsor Street,
Vancouver, B.C.
V5V 4P4

Interview Information and Tape Release

Re: Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia
Literacy Impact Study

I, ______________________________________, understand I will be paid $10.00 per hour for this interview.

I understand my identity will not be revealed in any reporting of the interview.

I release all rights to the interview information for use in the production of the Literacy Impact Study Report.

, 1993

Signed

APPENDIX F — PHYLLIS'S STORY

_ It had such an impact in my life _

I am divorced and a single parent with two children. My life is very busy, very full. Raising two kids is quite a hassle while going to school, especially in post-secondary schooling. It is something I thought I wasn't prepared for, but I realize I am. Coming from my background, the first year I was there I didn't think I had much hope. I was fighting an alcohol and drug problem. I decided well, I'd try to go back to school. I just didn't ever foresee in my future that a year later I would be in a [college] criminology program, and that my life would do a complete ninety degree turn.

When I first started there, it was very hard for me. I was introverted and shy. I had no self-esteem whatsoever. When I wrote the entry exam I had about a grade 7 education, maybe grade 8. I was twenty-six years old then.

The thought of going back to school was very scary. What I found there was unbelievable, the learning experience. At times it was very hard for someone who has been out of school, but the program itself, the instructors were patient, and very understanding. They seemed to realize that after you have been out of school, say 15 years, you need a special kind of understanding. They had that. They worked along with you at your own pace. It wasn't only an instructor-student relationship. They were there in our life as friends, which made a big difference.

One hard thing I found attending [ABE] was fighting my addiction problem. There were times throughout the first year where I would feel that I couldn't go on because of the personal problems I was experiencing. Through our programs we would have things called sharing circles. We developed a friendship within that class that was almost like a family, and when one of us was hurting, the others would be there in a type of moral support.

The program completely changed my life because it gave me a sense of self-worth, something I didn't have when I grew up. In grade 6 I dropped out of school. I tried to go back, and I made it into grade 7, and it just got progressively worse. I was told, "You're stupid, you'll never learn, you'll never amount to anything". After thirteen years of hearing that, a person starts to believe it. I wound up getting married when I was fifteen, and divorced by the time I was seventeen. Basically all of my skills were telephone soliciting, working in a bar, waitressing.

When I met my second husband and we had two children, I started to think. I always wanted to go back to school. I don't like to quit things, and I kept thinking if someday I could eventually learn. I had some tests done, and the doctor confirmed that there was nothing wrong with my brain, other than what the alcohol had killed. Once I had my children, I realized my marriage wasn't going to work out. I really began to think seriously about going back to school. I started to look into different facilities, and I was told that most had a two-year waiting list.

When my marriage split up, my addiction problem really started. So my husband agreed to take the children until I got on my feet. My addiction got very bad, and as it progressed my self-esteem went further down the tube. Finally I decided to try a geographical cure. I moved to this city.

My step-mother told me about the Centre. She had gone there. I thought well, I'll give it a shot. I phoned down, and they told me come in and write an assessment test.

One thing I realized when I walked in was it didn't seem like a real school. The atmosphere was very friendly and very open. I looked around and saw people older than myself, which gave me a bit of a boost right there. Because when I think of upgrading I was thinking that they will all be little fifteen, sixteen year olds. There were ladies who were fifty, and I thought, "Wow! If they can do it, I'm only twenty-six, maybe I can do it". I wrote the assessment test at the beginning of August and a week later I was phoned and brought in for an interview. I was accepted.

There are just so many good things that I want to say about the program that it is just a bit overwhelming for me. There is more offered than basic education. There are a lot of things, such as the sharing circles. It helped me in a sense because when I came here with the self-esteem I had, I was also ashamed of being Native. We took a course, First Nations, for social studies. It was the first time that I was able to learn about my culture. The instructor we had at the time, I found her to be awfully rough on us. We never saw quite eye to eye. But, in a sense she helped me because she never would accept anything less than excellent.

Coming from where I came from, to think that I actually have a future now and I can make a home for my children. I at one time thought it would be a life of welfare which is what I grew up on - drinking, just never being able to have a good job. But the changes and the doors that open. From my last practicum I've actually been offered a position. It has been such a drastic change in my life.

My husband never had a problem with drinking or drugs, but I had. I had quit for seven years. But when we broke up he watched the change that I went through - from being a good mother into a shell of a person barely able to function. The change now that he can see in me [as a result of ABE], it helped him to realize that he didn't want to be a labourer all his life. He's thirty-nine, and he chose to go back to school [in ABE where he lives]. I'm really proud of him. I know how hard it was for myself at twenty-six, so I imagine at his age it must have taken a lot of courage. He was saying that watching the change that he watched me go through to the point that I'm at now has given him the courage to take the stand.

Our relationship had been on the rocks for some time, and basically, I found myself not happy. I wanted to go back to school for about three years into our relationship. My husband felt that women had no need for education. He had ideas that women were to stay home and do the baking and the cooking, and looking after kids. But I found I wasn't happy there. I mean I was happy enough in the home, but I always felt that there was a large part missing, that I somehow had a plan. I really didn't know what the plan was—just that I wasn't happy, I wasn't growing, and I wasn't learning. I was just stagnating. When the relationship finally ended, he laughed when he heard that I was going to go back to school. At that point in time I had no idea of what I would eventually hope to accomplish, other than getting my GED.

There were a lot of feelings of fear for me. One was my age. I didn't feel that I'd fit in. The others were low self-esteem. I felt what is the point of going back. I'm incapable of learning. When you hear that you won't amount to anything, that you are stupid, you really get a complex. In my case, I set myself up to fail. I had never completed anything in my life, other than going through labour and having kids. Anything I had tried to do, be it a job, be it my marriage, I could only stay with it so long. Even if I was doing well, I would find a way to mess it up.

The first year, the upgrading, there were so many times I wanted to quit and throw in the towel, but the support was there. The Center seems to realize that you have to heal within yourself before you can accomplish the goals you are capable of doing. Once the healing began for me, I was able to get my certificate from the Center. I have my GED completed. I've taken three parenting classes. I have my certificate in first aid and CPR. They may seem to some people to be minor accomplishments, but just the feeling I had when I actually graduated last year....the feeling of accomplishment was just overwhelming. It's carried me to this year. I'm taking the full college load.

There are still times for me where you get really overwhelmed, and you think "Can you do it?" or "Are you going to make it?" When I look at the certificates on my wall now, it is such a good feeling and I know I can do it. Before the program, it was just a road that I never thought that I would get to. I didn't think I'd ever have my children back.

I went into self-help to deal with my addiction, and there were days when I would come in, and the last thing I'd want to do would be open a book. I just would not want to be there. At the same time, I knew if I wasn't in the program, I'd be down on the street. One certificate I did get also was for a perfect year of attendance, which was new to me. I knew even when I didn't want to be there that that was the place I had to be. It just had such a heavy impact on my life because the instructors weren't only there to teach you. They didn't treat you like you're less than, they treated you as though you were equal, and that was totally new.

I guess I had pre-conceived thoughts that school was going to be a place of hurt and embarrassment; the things it had been in my younger years. So I had a really deep fear of coming back. I thought, "Why should I subject to the embarrassments and the feelings of being ridiculed in front of people?" Instead it was like walking into an environment full of hope and understanding.

When I came here I was very untrusting, I was very introverted. To get me to say more than five words was a real accomplishment. Even just sitting here today, being able to do this interview, makes me.....

Everyone involved with the program, they let you know that the only question that is stupid is the one that you don't ask. That was something that I really needed reinforced. I was always afraid to ask a question for fear of being laughed at. The instructors would sit, have coffee with you and chat.

Some of us had a lot of problems in reading. If you had a problem with reading, you would get tutoring. It was made fun, it was interesting. A lot of our learning comes from things that we are interested in, instead of books like "See Spot Run". It was great that way too because I found that when you are interested in what you are learning about it makes learning fun.

The communication skills were brought out, and a lot of us besides myself were introverted. When you have a class of twenty people who are supposed to be having a discussion, and all are sitting there looking at the floor, looking at everything except each other, class can tend to be a bit slow. I actually remember thinking, "How stupid. What is the idea behind this?" About half way through the year, if we didn't have these exercises, we were crying "we missed this today" or "why didn't we do this?"

Looking in retrospect, it is just wonderful. I find now that I can talk; I'm still a bit shy, but one accomplishment I did this year was I went to a public inquiry about Aboriginal people in the justice system. They asked if anyone would speak, and it was like someone else got up and walked to the microphone. I spoke and I shook the whole time, but the judge looked at me and said I was well educated, and articulate. I think that was the highest compliment. It meant so much to me because it came from somebody that didn't know me at all. [Before] I was always on the wrong side of the law. To be able to go and face a judge without being in a court room setting, and not being as intimidated as I would have been two years ago, was just overwhelming for me. It was a really good experience. I feel that the program gave me that.

When my husband left me, and to cope with my addiction, I did a lot of things that were on the other side of the law. That is a hard life to change. The year before I had been involved in what you might say criminal activity: selling dope, shoplifting, buying and selling stolen merchandise. Just about anything you could name somewhere along my life I had my hands on it. Once you get into that lifestyle, it is very hard to change, and to develop a new circle of friends.

My experiences with the law, being on the other side of it usually, this is why I had no idea [I would end up in] a program such as criminology—that is really awesome to me. This is something else in the education program—they helped you explore the possibilities. I got a compliment from a lady that has known me since I moved here. She came up and introduced herself and said, "You've grown so much in the last two years, from the shell of a woman what you were. I can remember when I first met you. You had no conception that any doors could be opened for you. You're going out now and making those doors open, and seeing all these different areas that you can choose to go into." That is what the program did for me.

Now I'm registered at College for my second year. It's like the doors will continue opening as long as my education is still going. To think that maybe three more years, and I'll be finished. There are so many jobs in the justice field that people can go into: the courts, the RCMP, probation, courtworking, it is like the world is my oyster, and I can choose where I can go. It probably sounds like bragging but my grade point average is 4.0, and I look at that and think "You're not stupid!" It is like a revelation to me. I've actually been hired for the summer.

From someone who came from washing dishes, and cleaning bathrooms for ten years, to think that I'm eventually going to have a career and be self-supporting and off the welfare system. This is my first year off of welfare, I think in my whole life to be very honest. It's great. I don't have to go and report to a social worker every month. It's like I don't have any chains. You're not asking for any hand-outs. It's tremendous.

What I'd like to see—the school system seems to be changing slowly. If in some ways they could implement what's offered in the adult education, treat children with respect instead of how I grew up. I blame a lot of what happened on instructors and peer pressure, but basically on the system. I was just sort of pushed through. It didn't matter that I couldn't read, I was just moved on to the next grade. It didn't matter that I couldn't accomplish anything in mathematics. It was like a treadmill, just push her ahead. There was no respect, I can remember teachers making fun of students, really being responsible for most of us growing up with emotional problems. I would like to see my children being treated with respect.

It [ABE] started teaching me responsibility, getting myself to school everyday. That instilled in me a sense of responsibility, accomplishment. Dealing with everyday life had always been hard for me. I didn't deal with problems, I just put them on the shelf and kind of hoped that they'd go away. Anger management— didn't have any, my anger would just build in me and I would eventually explode. I brought this pattern with me into the upgrading program. Several times I did explode—and just totally went off the wall, and it was OK. The people around you treated you with the same respect as they did before incidents would happen. Yet they'd help work through them. They taught me how to communicate, one-on-one as well as in group situations. They showed me that you can turn negative things in your life into a positive. It gave me the courage to enter a parenting group. Because I didn't receive the best of upbringing, I again carried the pattern over to my children. I can't say enough about how it has changed my life. My children are benefiting from the changes that I have come through. You can just see the change in them because they are much happier than they were two years ago.

We were introduced to a new way of looking at things. [Before] I didn't like people that were educated because I never knew what to say. We were introduced to a lot of political things, and new ways of looking at things, and for myself, the instructor had to start at the very beginning. I had no idea of history. I didn't even know what self-government was. That's how ignorant I was at that time, uninformed.

As I started to realize the changes that were happening, I started to feel more comfortable about my knowledge. I lost a lot of my shyness. If they did bring up a political discussion, I had the feeling, well at least I'm not going to say something totally stupid.

The program has gotten me in a lot of areas that I just didn't have an interest in before. I'm involved in Women Against Violence, M.A.D, different organizations, Women Allowed, and just things I didn't even realize were out there. [I discovered] that I was capable of donating since I always had time to donate. It was just I didn't think that I could do anything that could be of any value to anybody, or that I could make a difference in any way. So I just didn't bother. Once I got started to be involved in fund-raising activities, and volunteer work through the Center. I've gained the feeling of self-confidence, and self-esteem.

At one point I was tutoring other students, and that made me feel really good. I didn't have much to put on my resume. I've been finding that now my resume is getting quite long with volunteer things, different groups that I am involved in. And when I look at what I had to begin with, the resume I used to have, I wasn't exactly proud of barmaid, chambermaid for a month. The change has been wonderful.

When I started the program, they started me at about a grade 7 level. We worked pretty hard at it, I had tutoring, a lot of tutoring, because I was striving to get good grades. The level that I'm at now I have grade 12 Math. My GED mathematical scores were really good. I tried so many times through the years and never learned, so it is the program itself that the learning has to be coming from. It is the way it is coming across, because normally I tried so many times on my own and couldn't learn, and all of a sudden now, I've got it.

Where I began, my English skills were poor, probably about a grade 8 to start. When I finished and rewrote the exam I was at a post-secondary level, which is quite a jump. If you had a written assignment, and it was done poorly, you were given it back and told to try again. It wasn't all left up to you. They would sit down and show you where you'd gone wrong, and try to help you find a way to get through it. My English skills now, I'm very comfortable with it—written is my strength. I can communicate better with the pen than I can verbally. I won an award for English. I think it was the first award I ever won. I finished with a 98% average, and I felt quite good about it, like I deserved it. It was a shock. Where I'm at now. we're taking courses such as Introduction to Policing, Introduction to Criminology, Pre-law.

I've been watching some of the other people in the upgrading program. They made my problems seem small. These ladies that are quite a bit older than I am, and they are in there giving it all they got. They are really learning, and you can see such a growth in them. I've seen people that have had to start at the very bottom of the scale, and they keep climbing up there, and it is like, Wow! They are so determined! The program gave me back my self-respect because they didn't feed your ego, yet if you had done well, you knew. It was so intricately put together.

It is like the extended family teaching unit because they teach you everything from how to communicate, how to respect each other, how to respect earth and our bodies. When I first came here I couldn't admit that I had any alcohol or drug problems. I guess it was pretty obvious, but they didn't judge me. There was never a judgment made. When I finally did ask for help, the help and love and support was there. When we graduated, I don't think I ever felt so much of an overwhelming love for all my instructors and other classmates that had struggled through with me. The growth and change was just so big, it was unbelievable.

I guess I was lucky. Being through the Centre's program taught me how to relate and taught me how to express how I'm feeling, and address my feelings. Being able to communicate honestly with people, and accept at the same time how they are feeling, and that their feelings are valid.

I was at my rock bottom and I don't think I would even be here today if it wasn't for the program, the feelings and the change it has brought into my life.

Phyllis is an Aboriginal Canadian, age 28. She started her upgrading at the Intermediate level and is currently studying Criminology in a community college.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balshaw, H. B. (1993). *Living Intentionally: A Study of Nonviolent Men Who Witnessed Spousal Abuse in Childhood.* Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Educational Psychology. Calgary: University of Calgary.

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist, 37* (2), 122-147.

Beder H., & Valentine, T. (1990). Motivational profiles of adult basic education students. *Adult Education Quarterly, 40,* 78-94.

Berthoff, A. (1987). Foreword to Freire, P. and Macedo, D. (eds)*Literacy: Reading The Word and The World.* South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers Inc.

Bly, R. (1989). *A Gathering of Men.* Videotaped interview done by Bill Moyers for the Public Broadcasting System, aired December, 1989.

Bogdan, R. & Bikler, S.K. (1982). *Qualitative research in education.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Charnley, A., & Jones H.A. (1979). *The concept of success in adult literacy.* London, England: ALBSU.

Darkenwald, G., & Valentine, T. (1984). *Outcomes and impact of adult basic education.* New Brunswick, NJ: Centre for Adult Development, Rutgers University.

Darville, R. (1989). Prospects for adult literacy policy in British Columbia. *Policy Explorations, 4,* (4), Vancouver, British Columbia: Centre for Policy Studies in Education, University of British Columbia. 2-22.

Faries, R. (1992). *Lifelong learning for the 21st century: A report on the future development of adult/continuing education in British Columbia.* Victoria: Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour.

Fingeret, A. (1984). *Adult literacy: Current and future directions.* (Information Series No. 284) Columbus, Ohio: National Centre for Research in Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 246 308)

Freire, P. and Macedo, D. (eds)*Literacy: Reading The Word and The World.* South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers Inc.

Human Resources Development Project. (1992). *Report of the steering committee.* Victoria: Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour.

Labonte, R. (1989). Community and professional empowerment. *The Canadian Nurse, 85* (3), 23-28.

Malicky, G. V., & Norman, C. (1993). *Adult literacy programs: Participation, experiences, effects.* Unpublished report. University of Alberta: Edmonton.

Metzger, D. (1992). *Writing For Your Life: A Guide and Companion to the Inner World.* San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.

Murphy, B. (1993). Literacy in the Land of Oz: Panacea or Smokescreen. *Literacy Bin*, January, The Movement for Canadian Literacy, Ottawa. 4-6.

National Anti-Poverty Organization. (1992). *Literacy and poverty: A view from inside.* Ottawa.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (1992). *Adult Illiteracy and economic performance*. Paris, France: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods: 2nd edition*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.

Patton, M.Q. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage.

Quigley, A. B. (1990). Hidden logic: reproduction and resistance in adult literacy and adult basic education. *Adult Education Quarterly. 40* (2), 103-115.

Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in empowerment: introduction to the issue. *Prevention in Human Services. 3*, 1-7.

Rivers and Associates. (1992). *The ABE research report: Adult basic education in British Columbia.* Victoria: Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour.

Rodriguez, C. & Sawyer, D. (1990). *Native* Literacy Research Report. Victoria: British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training & Technology and the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, National Literacy Secretariat.

Statistics Canada. (1991). *Adult literacy in Canada: Results of a national study.* Ottawa: author.

Thomas, A. M. (1990). *The reluctant learner: A research report on nonparticipation and dropout in literacy programs in British Columbia*. Victoria: British Columbia Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour.

Wishart, C. (1993). Characteristics of Community Based Education. Calgary: University of Calgary M. Ed. Program. Education Policy and Administration Department.

Additional Reading

Baker, C., Wuest, J. & Stern, P.N. (1992). Method slurring: The grounded theory/phenomenology example. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 17*: 1355-1360.

Berelson, B. (1971). *Content analysis in communication research*. New York: Hafner.

Crabtree, B.F. & Miller, W. L. (Eds.) (1992). *Doing qualitative research*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research.* Newbury Park, California: Sage.

Fingeret, A. (1982). *Through the looking glass: Literacy as perceived by illiterate adults.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York.. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 22 698)

Fingeret, A. (1983). Social Network: A new perspective on independence and illiterate adults. *Adult Education Quarterly, 33* (3), 133-146.

Kirk, J. & Miller, M. (1986). *Reliability and validity in qualitative research.* Newbury Park, California: Sage.

Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology.* Beverly Hills, California: Sage.

Le Compte, M.D. and Goetz, J.P. (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. *Review of Educational Research. 52* (1): 31-60.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods.* Beverly Hills, California: Sage.

Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1986). Drawing valid meaning from qualitative data in Cordray, D. and Lipsey, M. (Eds.) *Evaluation Studies Review Annual, 11.* Beverly Hills, California: Sage.

Miles, M.B. (1979). Qualitative data as an attractive nuisance: The problem of analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*, 590-601.

Smith, J.K. (1983 b). Quantitative vs. qualitative research: An attempt to clarify the issue. *Educational Researcher, 12*(3), 6-13.

Van Maanen, J. (1983). *Qualitative methodology.* Beverly Hills, California: Sage.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Association promotes excellence in adult basic education, instruction and programming.

People in the Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia

- care about high quality learning opportunities for under-educated adults.
- work with others involved in adult education.
- raise awareness of the basic educational needs of British Columbians.
- publish *Groundwork*, a professional publication for adult basic educators in British Columbia.
- donate awards to outstanding students in each member institution.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PATTY BOSSORT

Patty Bossort has taught in ABE/Literacy programs for colleges and community groups in Vancouver, Victoria and the West Kootenays since 1980. She has been an independent consultant for the past five years offering support services to the Adult Literacy Cost Shared Projects Fund and conducting needs assessments, research, and evaluation for various literacy programs. She has a B.A. in Parks and Recreation Management and Community Education. She works and lives in Silverton, British Columbia.

BRUCE COTTINGHAM

Bruce Cottingham, a former school teacher and college instructor, has been an independent consultant for the past ten years. He provides research, advisory and training services to First Nations and other governments, community organizations and small business. He holds degrees in commerce and education. His home is in New Denver, British Columbia.

LESLIE GARDNER

Leslie Gardner has twenty years experience in design and management of process and outcomes evaluations in community and institutional health and social services settings. Her recent work includes evaluation of programs for rejuvenating Aboriginal languages in the Yukon. She holds a Ph.D. in psychology from York University, Toronto. She lives and works in Edmonton, Alberta and commutes regularly to Victoria to enjoy her sailboat.